

## Families as Partners

### *Parent Teams and Parent/Family Involvement*

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*The term parent/family involvement refers to all the different ways that parents and other family members can support their children. Whether occurring at home or in school, this support has a direct impact on students' academic and social achievement. (Note that "family members" may be biological relatives or other individuals who have some or total legal responsibility for a student's well-being and school success.) The home-school partnership is not an event or a series of events; it is not a numbers game. Rather, the partnership is a process of building relationships that provide support to the children and adolescents in school so that all children achieve well in and out of school. This chapter presents detailed and comprehensive guidelines, checklists, and activities to ensure the fullest participation of parents and families.*

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Our work has given us insight into effective ways to involve families in schools. We have learned not to talk about “parent involvement” but rather “parent/family involvement.” This is, in part, because *parent* is limiting in definition, particularly in the very diverse world in which we now live. We now have one-parent families, two-parent families, extended families, adopted families, grandparents-raising-children families, homeless families, and many more. Our experiences have taught us that the language we use may send unintended messages.

In this chapter, we are not focusing on work that is done directly with parents and families. Rather, we are focusing on SDP’s work with the school-based Parent Team and that team’s role in involving parents and families at all levels of school life. We focus on the process of building a program and on creating solutions based on self-diagnosed needs. Our strategy in this chapter is to draw attention to the key steps and principles involved in building a program for parents and families and to provide a few templates to guide team discussions, as well as sample exercises and resource lists of program ideas for further development and adaptation to your site.

The intent of a formal program for parents and families is to establish a home-school partnership. It serves to reduce the cultural gap that may exist between the home and school, thereby fostering a climate of partnership. SDP enables school personnel and parents/families who may be alienated from one another (for whatever reasons) to begin working together on neutral tasks rather than to start with complex—perhaps even value-laden—issues. By working together on specific events, school personnel and parents/families can begin getting to know one another, learn to respect one another, and eventually view themselves as participants in a collaborative enterprise rather than as adversaries in a competitive power play.

## INSIGHTS INTO THE HOME-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP

Parent/family involvement is a key element of SDP. SDP recognizes the critical role parents can and should play in their children’s education from the moment they first enter the schoolhouse to graduation day.

With care and nurturing, an emotional attachment and bond develops between the child, the parents, and the family. This bond allows the family to influence the child’s development along the critical developmental pathways necessary for learning and growing well in today’s society. Through day-to-day life with their families, children learn all kinds of things. For example, when a curious child asks questions and receives answers and explanations from parents or other significant adult members of the family, those adults are stimulating and encouraging that child’s development. When the adults show that they are interested in reading, the child internalizes the idea of reading as something important. The motivation for learning, therefore, grows out of the child’s relationship (attachment and bonding) with important and valued adults.

A child from a “nonmainstream,” marginal family is likely to have missed out on such early stimulation and enters school unprepared to meet the expectations of

school, a mainstream institution. A child is expected to learn to read at school, but may come from a home in which no one reads and may never have heard a parent read bedtime stories. The child's language skills may be "underdeveloped" or "non-standard." There are other areas in which expectations at home and at school may be radically at odds. For example, in some families a child who does not fight back will be punished. A child then goes to school and gets in trouble when he or she fights back. For children who come to school "underdeveloped" or "differently developed," school becomes even more challenging by second and third grades, and by eight or nine years of age children have developed the cognitive capacity to understand why they and their family are different from the people at school.

Parents/families are the source of a child's self-affirmation. Children will believe what the people they love and trust believe, including how they feel about school. If parents mistrust the school and staff, their children will more than likely feel the same way and may feel alienated from school and staff. In order to overcome that mistrust, parents/families must be made to feel comfortable and welcome in the school. Only then can they work effectively with school staff in support of all aspects of the child's development. It is important for schools to learn how to create a welcoming and comfortable environment and to constantly examine what things the school does (unconsciously or consciously) that make parents/families feel shut out. Too often (mostly unconsciously) the barriers to parent/family involvement are found within school practices and policies. Exploring these barriers should be one of the first tasks of the Parent Team, as we will discuss later in this chapter.

In summary, the relationships between parents/families and school personnel are central to the establishment of a positive school climate that supports the healthy development of children.

## **CATEGORIES OF PARENT/FAMILY INVOLVEMENT**

The parent program is best conceptualized as a multilevel process with three distinct yet overlapping participatory categories: broad participation and support, active daily participation in schools, and participation in school management.

### **Broad Participation and Support**

The first and broadest type of involvement encompasses the many general ways in which parents and families support their children's education, both at home and at school. The act of sending children to school ready for school is parental involvement; so is the act of insisting that the children work hard, respect others, and complete their homework. Reading to children, involving them in activities outside of school, cooking and shopping with them—all these constitute parental involvement in education. Families may be involved at school through membership in the home-school organization (called PTA, PTSA, PTO, Parent Advisory Group) and/or through attending or contributing to various school activities such as potluck dinners, school performances, parades, open house events, home-school organization meetings, report card conferences, sports events, bake sales, family fun days, and picnics.

General events that encourage and permit broad-based family participation serve several important purposes. They create opportunities to meet the needs

outlined in the Comprehensive School Plan for parents and families. Consider what can be accomplished at family math nights or at workshops offered for families on such topics as communication skills for parents and staff, state testing and what it means at home, problem solving strategies around issues families face, or how to create science fair projects. At the same time, well-thought-out activities such as these can break down barriers between parents/families and school staff. By working together on projects, families and staff can see each other as adults with common goals. This can help create a school climate that is inviting, caring, and accepting.

### **Active Participation in Schools**

Parent/family involvement is raised to another level when family members become engaged in the day-to-day life of the school in such activities as

- volunteering in classrooms, the office, the cafeteria, or the library
- chaperoning field trips or before- or afterschool activities
- tutoring children before, during, or after school
- taking “welcoming” duty before or after school or participating in “parent patrols”

In this category, parents/families are in the building taking part in the school’s educational programs—they are learning and growing along with students and staff. Children see their family members interacting with school personnel and are more likely to imitate, identify with, and internalize the values and goals of the school.

### **Participation in School Management**

At the third and highest level of involvement, parents participate as decision-makers in school governance and management. They may play a leadership role in the parent organization, serve on the School Planning and Management Team (SPMT) or on one of the subcommittees, speak before the board of education on behalf of the Parent Team, or contribute to school staff or parent group development. By participating at this level, parents develop the social, organizational, and political skills needed to bring about institutional change. They also become more involved in understanding school data and may participate in writing the school plan. The hoped-for result is that more parent/family activities will truly reflect the goals of the plan and make a difference for all the students in a particular community.

Schools need to appreciate and acknowledge that parent/family involvement is very complex and is a matter of building relationships over time. Understanding the value and purpose of all three types of parental involvement and what can be achieved with each is a critical first step in establishing a parent program. In the most developed parent programs, family and parent involvement will be seen in all three categories.

## **STEPS TO BUILDING THE HOME-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP**

There are three basic steps in building parent/family involvement in SDP schools: understanding parent/family involvement at your school, forming the Parent Team

**Figure 10.1** Ten truths of parent/family involvement

1. All parents have hopes and goals for their children.  
*They differ in how they support their children's efforts to achieve those goals.*
2. The home is one of several spheres of influence that simultaneously shape a child.  
*The school must work in concert with other spheres for the child's benefit, not push them apart.*
3. The parent is the central contributor to a child's education.  
*Schools can either co-opt that role or recognize the potential of the parent.*
4. Parent involvement must be a legitimate element of education.  
*It deserves equal emphasis with elements such as program improvement and evaluation.*
5. Parent involvement is a process, not a program of activities.  
*It requires ongoing energy and effort.*
6. Parents' interaction with their own children is the cornerstone of parent involvement.  
*A program must recognize the value, diversity, and difficulty of this role.*
7. Parent involvement requires a vision, policy, and framework.  
*A consensus of understanding is important.*
8. Most barriers to parent involvement are found within school practices.  
*They are not found within parents.*
9. Any parent can be "hard to reach."  
*Parents must be identified and approached individually; they are not defined by gender, ethnicity, family situation, education, or income.*
10. Successful parent involvement nurtures relationships and partnerships.  
*It strengthens the bonds between home and school, parent and educator, parent and child, school and community.*

SOURCE: Courtesy of RMC Research Corporation, Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

and building parent/family membership on committees, and examining barriers to parent/family involvement and working out solutions.

## Understanding Parent/Family Involvement at Your School

One of the first steps to working on increasing parent/family involvement is to understand the different levels of involvement as described above. Another step is to assess and appreciate what is already in place. The staff and active parents and family members should discuss why they want more involvement and what the term *more involvement* means to them. This in itself takes some understanding, much dialogue, and consensus building.

In building awareness of factors in parental involvement, it is important for staff to examine their attitudes, values, and feelings relative to the students they teach and their families. We have found that without a positive belief system in the families and students we serve, parent/family involvement will not flourish. The "Ten truths of parent/family involvement" (Figure 10.1) would be good material for such discussions. Families and school staff need to read these as starters and dialogue about them. "Let's react to some of these statements. How do you feel about them? Do you

**Figure 10.2** Understanding parent/family involvement at your school

1. Identify all the parents and/or family members who are involved as individuals or in groups in your building.
2. Clarify the functions and activities of each group:
  - Which parents/families does each group target and reach? Discuss discrepancies if any.
  - Which group will be the official Parent Team?
  - Is a PTA/PTO/PTSA already in place?
  - Will this be the Parent Team?
  - Will changes have to be made to ensure that this team is representative of your student population?
3. Determine what your school staff mean when they say, "We want more parent/family involvement." Once this is done:
  - What needs to be done to increase the level of involvement?
  - How does this fit into your Comprehensive School Plan?
4. Does your school provide a warm and welcoming environment for parents and families? If not:
  - What needs to be done?
  - Which teams or subcommittees will work on this?
  - How does this fit into your Comprehensive School Plan?
5. Does your school already have a good system for regular communication? If not:
  - How, specifically, can the Parent Team communicate regularly with its constituency groups?
  - How, specifically, can the entire staff work on regular communication?

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believe that \_\_\_\_\_ is true?" It is important to have a skilled facilitator lead the discussions to make the process helpful and constructive for the school.

Figure 10.2 displays the initial questions to be addressed in planning for parent involvement. Building consensus around parent involvement is easier to accomplish when the school staff is already working fairly well together and operating from an existing plan. A vision of what parent involvement will be at your school should evolve from the discussions and should then be incorporated into the Comprehensive School Plan.

### **Forming the Parent Team and Building Family Membership on Subcommittees**

Formation of the Parent Team is a critical step. The Parent Team, which is one of the three major teams of the Comer Process, can be your already existing PTA, PTO, PTSA, PTF, if that team is willing to fulfill the responsibilities of the Parent Team as outlined in Figure 10.3. The SPMT and existing parent organization need to discuss the following questions:

**Figure 10.3** Responsibilities of the parent team

- Plans and coordinates activities that support the goals identified in the Comprehensive School Plan
- Ensures that all dates and activities planned by the team are compatible with the overall school calendar
- Addresses the needs of the larger parent/family community
- Communicates with the SPMT (Family members serve on the SPMT and on all subcommittees.)
- Uncovers barriers to parent/family involvement and develops strategies to overcome the barriers, working collaboratively with the SPMT and Parent/Family Involvement Subcommittee (if this subcommittee exists)

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- Is the present team representative of our parent/family community? Or if we worked differently, could it be?
- Does it represent the different geographic areas our families come from?
- Does it represent ethnic, racial, and cultural groups in our school?
- Does it represent a cross-section of grade levels?
- Is the team willing to carry out the responsibilities of the Parent Team as outlined for SDP schools?

Once the Parent Team is operational, it works hand in hand with the SPMT and subcommittees to carry out the goals of the Comprehensive School Plan.

In addition, all the subcommittees in a school should seek parent/family membership on their committees by assessing the interests and needs of the larger parent community. This naturally depends on what skills and strengths parents/families bring to the school and are willing to develop with support from school staff. The staff needs to reach out in a strong, personal, and sincere way to recruit family members to serve on committees. In addition, ongoing and regular team-building work on the committees will be necessary to create the sort of climate that makes parents and staff alike want to continue on the team—that makes everyone feel that their contributions are worthwhile. We offer some suggestions for team-building activities in the section on Staff-Parent Training later in this chapter.

### **Examining Barriers to Parent/Family Involvement and Working Out Solutions**

Once the Parent Team is formed, a major challenge will be to uncover the reasons parents or families are not as involved as is necessary to make a difference academically and socially for all the students in your school. This is best accomplished by using a problem-solving strategy to discover the barriers and to brainstorm for solutions that will work for your school and community. We suggest that the team start by identifying what is working and then move to problem solving the barriers,

and we offer guides for this exercise in Figures 10.4 and 10.5. There are many problem-solving formats; Figure 10.5 offers just one example. Many schools, families, and staff have used this process.

While we encourage you to diagnose your own barriers and work toward solutions, as an additional resource we have compiled in Figures 10.6 and 10.7 a list of some of the challenges that others have faced and possible solutions. The list is divided into staff barriers and parent/family barriers. What is important to consider is that parent/family involvement is enhanced when the staff's commitment is as strong as that of the parents and families.

## STAFF-PARENT TRAINING FOR PARENT/FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

When a school begins the SDP process, parents and staff alike must be trained in the overall concepts and the role of the Parent Team, SPMT, subcommittees, and comprehensive school planning. This is an ongoing process that must continue from year to year as new parents and staff come to the school. Depending on the topic and the need, sometimes it may be preferable to train parents and families by themselves. At other times, it is ideal to have parents and staff train together. Not only do the groups learn the content at the same time, but also they have the opportunity to build relationships and get to know one another in a setting in which their roles are equalized. Parents should also serve on the Adult Development and Training Subcommittee in the school in order to help plan training. We have found that it is quite powerful when parents and staff begin to cotrain together, finding new opportunities to build relationships.

Figures 10.8 and 10.9 are sample materials that we have found particularly effective for team building and for stimulating discussion at the introductory phases of parent/family involvement work.

- Figure 10.8 is an example of a people search. At every event involving staff and parents, include a team-builder activity that connects to the event and encourages participants to really get to know each other. It is often easier to come back to school when you know others who will be there. Encourage the staff to reach out to meet and mingle with families.

- Figure 10.9 is a discussion activity entitled "Headbands" (Perrin, 1985) that we call "Hats." This activity allows participants to experience and observe the effect of attitude and communication on staff/parent/family involvement. "Headbands" is found in Kate Perrin's (1985) *National Leadership Camp: Leadership Curriculum Guide* (pp. 8–10).

## PROMISING PRACTICES AND PROGRAMS

Figure 10.10 brings together the critical practices that we have found important in parent and family involvement. We invite you to read through these to evaluate which concepts are already in place in your school and which practices could be

**Figure 10.4** Examining parent/family involvement practices

<p>List <b>three or more promising practices</b> and <b>three or more promising programs</b> (in your experience) that have proven to be highly successful in improving parent/family involvement.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.</li> <li>2.</li> <li>3.</li> <li>4.</li> <li>5.</li> <li>6.</li> </ol>
<p>List the <b>three major obstacles/deterrents</b> to the improvement of parent/family involvement in your school/district.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.</li> <li>2.</li> <li>3.</li> </ol>
<p>Develop <b>at least one strategy</b> to overcome each obstacle/deterrent you have identified.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.</li> <li>2.</li> <li>3.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Choose one of the above to implement in your school.</b></p>   

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**Figure 10.5** A problem-solving technique

<p>"Avoid that tug of war. . . . Guide your team through structured positive problem solving."</p> <p>Step 1 <u>Think</u> about one challenge you face regarding parent/family involvement.</p> <p>Step 2 <u>Pair</u> with one person at your table. <u>Discuss</u> each challenge/problem.</p> <p>Step 3 <u>Share</u> at your table. <u>Decide</u> on one challenge/problem to take through a structured problem-solving session.</p> <p>Step 4 <u>Write</u> your challenge/problem on chart paper as a "how to" statement.</p> <p>Step 5 <u>Brainstorm</u> and <u>record</u> possible solutions as "I wish" statements.</p> <p>Step 6 <u>Read</u> your list, <u>clarify</u>, and <u>combine</u> statements.</p> <p>Step 7 <u>Distribute</u> dots (maybe 10 to each person). Have each person <u>mark</u> his or her three top choices with dots. (If you feel strongly about one idea, you could even put 8 of your dots next to that one and one dot on another idea and one dot on a third idea.) The intent is to weigh your choices.</p> <p>Step 8 <u>Find</u> a partner whose view may differ from yours. Together <u>decide</u> on one top choice between the two of you. <u>Go</u> to the chart paper together and place another larger dot (or different color dot) on your choice.</p> <p>Step 9 Have the entire group <u>look</u> at the list and ask them if any <u>clarification</u> is <u>needed</u>.</p> <p>Step 10 <u>Combine</u> any solutions that are similar. <u>Check</u> with the persons who put them up to see if they agree to the combination.</p> <p>Step 11 As a group, <u>look for patterns</u>. <u>Narrow your choices</u>. You are looking for where the most <u>energy</u> is for making a change.</p> <p>Step 12 <u>Make a decision</u>. Pick a solution based on all the data.</p>
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SOURCE: Based on the work of "Problem-Solving for Practical Innovation" developed by Charlene Pasco, Ph.D. (1988). Courtesy of Prince George's County Public Schools, Maryland.

added or expanded. Dialogue about these concepts is an excellent beginning for the Parent Team, SPMT, or the climate subcommittee, as well as a subject for discussion at general faculty and grade-level meetings.

Your practices should guide you as you institute programs that will enhance the goals and objectives of the Comprehensive School Plan. There are hundreds and hundreds of programs and strategies that have been used at every level to bring about greater parent/family involvement and support in schools. As a resource, we have compiled specific ideas that others have found useful in Figure 10.11, "Strategies to increase home-school cooperation."

These lists cover a great deal of material. You may be thinking, "Where do we start?" There is no cookie cutter approach to parent/family involvement. There are, however, some basic steps, which we have included earlier. We urge you to first assess what you have in place and what is already working. Time and time again people say to us that they have poor parent/family involvement, yet when we work with the school we find many successful programs and practices in place. So start where you are and build on those strengths. Think attitude first: What are the attitudes of staff and parents relative to parents and families? From there, use the processes and committees in place to create the optimal situation.

*(Text continues on page 125)*

Figure 10.6 Overcoming staff barriers to the home-school partnership

<b>Staff Barriers</b>
<p><b>1. Lack of common understanding about the definition of the home-school partnership</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a common definition of the home-school partnership across the school community that includes appreciating parents we might not ever physically see but who: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>call and ask questions</li> <li>support the school and teacher verbally at home</li> <li>read to their children and work with them at home</li> <li>provide concrete experiences for their children outside of the school</li> </ul> </li> <li>• As a staff, establish specific tasks and activities for which parent/family involvement and participation is needed; publicize these early and often.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Resistance by staff to having parents/families involved in school in any way</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand that it is difficult for all human beings to learn to share power. When those first difficult attempts at power sharing are made, commend the initiative and point out specifically how this collaboration is enhancing the overall effort toward improving the school.</li> <li>• Take staff on a tour of the attendance area as a way of helping them to feel comfortable with the community.</li> <li>• Historically, staff may have felt parents' lack of trust or reluctance to communicate. In the past, many parents have had no contact with the staff members except to receive bad news, such as a child's academic or behavioral failures. Encourage staff to contact parents regularly with good news about their children.</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Unwillingness to make the necessary investment of time</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help staff to understand how home-school partnerships around academic and psychosocial development goals can make their classroom tasks easier.</li> <li>• Ask staff to divide up the calendar of scheduled events and take turns attending.</li> <li>• Help staff understand that the idea of partnerships with parents is not only about attending meetings and events, but rather, it is about developing relationships based upon mutual respect and shared responsibility for teaching children well.</li> <li>• Encourage social events for families and staff that (1) emphasize interaction and relaxation and de-emphasize roles (such as potluck suppers and musical programs), and (2) are tied into your school goals for academic growth and positive climate development.</li> </ul>
<p><b>4. Lack of time available in the existing schedule</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initially honor and work within the time constraints of the staff.</li> <li>• Collaboratively problem solve to decide times that honor the time constraints of staff as well as parents.</li> </ul>
<p><b>5. No built-in welcoming and/or reaching out when parents enter school</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Train entire staff to greet and welcome parents/families wherever they are in the building. Include support staff in training to welcome and invite parents/families.</li> <li>• Make sure that the school physically reflects the language and culture of all students in artwork, signage, etc.</li> <li>• Make sure that the building and grounds are clean and inviting.</li> <li>• Create a "welcome wagon" packet or program to welcome new and entering parents/families and provide them with basic information to support a comfortable transition into school.</li> </ul>

(Continued)

Figure 10.6 (Continued)

<p><b>6. Lack of skills/knowledge in how to work with all parents/families</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a climate in which all staff are comfortable in admitting this.</li> <li>• Have training for staff in how to effectively hold parent/teacher conferences as well as how to present in front of adults.</li> <li>• Urge teacher-training institutions to build in more preservice training on effective parent/family involvement strategies.</li> </ul>
<p><b>7. Communications that are too boring, complicated, long, or negative</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hold staff workshops on effective positive communication skills for verbal and written communication as well as for effective outreach strategies.</li> <li>• Provide training to improve the telephone skills of everyone in the front office.</li> <li>• Shorten communications.</li> <li>• Make sure that communications are bilingual as needed.</li> <li>• Discuss all items to be sent home via students in class with the students.</li> <li>• Send positive communications home, not just negative notes or problems.</li> <li>• Make personal contacts as often as possible—not just written notes.</li> <li>• Use creative methods for children to tell their parents that there is a meeting at school: Have children write invitations with a space for RSVP signatures; stamp a figure or smiling face on child's hand to remind parents of an evening meeting; make a string necklace designed in the shape of a house or animal and attach to meeting notice information.</li> <li>• Remember to multitask whenever you see parents/families—use every moment to connect about upcoming activities/events.</li> <li>• Consider making home visits from time to time. Invite a few families to a coffee hour with the principal at the home of another parent/family.</li> </ul>
<p><b>8. Lack of understanding of “culture” of families (system for living)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Train staff in developing school practices that accommodate the growing diversity of the families they serve.</li> <li>• Recognize that a set of rules or expectations at home may be different from those at school. Bridge those differences without making students feel that what goes on at home is bad.</li> <li>• Train staff to understand, recognize, and celebrate the multiple cultures, ethnicities, languages, and religions represented at the school.</li> <li>• Allow students to work cooperatively.</li> <li>• Have kids interview their families about their lives and culture.</li> <li>• Establish a classroom speaker's bureau with parents/families so they can share their experiences, culture, hobbies, etc.</li> </ul>

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**Figure 10.7** Overcoming parent and family member barriers to partnerships with school and district staff

<b>Parent/Family Barriers</b>
<p><b>1. Psychological issues: fear, anxiety, school phobia, intimidation, etc.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work to develop staff sensitivity about one of the most significant obstacles in their communication with parents/families: the fact that many parents see themselves as educationally unqualified to be sharing decision making with college- and university-educated professional staff.</li> <li>• Teach staff to model respect for all types of families.</li> <li>• Recognize that all families want the best for their children.</li> <li>• Make sure that all areas of the school are welcoming, inviting, and family-friendly and that all staff are trained to welcome and engage parents/families.</li> <li>• Nurture positive relationships by socializing and teambuilding with parents at every meeting.</li> <li>• Have nametags at all meetings.</li> <li>• At every meeting make sure that staff mingle with, meet, greet, and sit with parents/families and do not cluster into a “staff choir.”</li> <li>• Invite experienced parents/families to share information about effective parent/teacher conferencing as well as knowledge and skills in how to work with teachers, the school, and the school system.</li> <li>• Have teachers become more visible in the neighborhood.</li> <li>• Establish a welcome wagon program for families new to the school.</li> <li>• Call parents/families with good news before they contact you.</li> <li>• Listen twice as much as we talk.</li> <li>• Make invitations real and sincere. Avoid “surface only” invitations.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Prior negative experiences (as a student or as a parent in other schools)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build trust by listening to parents, inviting their input, and pairing them with individual staff members or other positively involved parents/families.</li> <li>• Call parents with positive reports about their children.</li> <li>• Provide students with recognition and rewards for academic achievement and positive social behavior to motivate and encourage them.</li> <li>• Involve parents in planning social events.</li> <li>• Hire staff that reflect the diversity of the students and the community.</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Attention focused on basic survival needs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide a warm, caring, and no-fault climate for families under stress.</li> <li>• Adjust the school's rules or program to accommodate difficult family circumstances.</li> <li>• Make arrangements for parents who may have difficult schedules (due to family obligations, working several jobs, working unusual shifts) to be involved in school projects and activities.</li> <li>• Arrange for transportation and child care for school events.</li> <li>• Inform parents of services available to them in the community.</li> <li>• Intervene in other institutions on behalf of parents and families.</li> <li>• Create a dedicated “parent/family resource area” in the school.</li> <li>• Provide refreshments or small meals for meetings.</li> <li>• Assess socioeconomic impact of scheduled events: Can our families afford the admission to our events or the expense of participating in book fairs, bake sales, etc.?</li> </ul>

*(Continued)*

Figure 10.7 (Continued)

<p><b>4. Activities not meeting the needs of parents (no ties to school improvement plan and overall student-centered planning process)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make sure that parents are represented on all subcommittees and have an active role in developing, implementing, monitoring, and assessing the school improvement plan.</li> <li>• Survey parents to find out what they like/dislike about the school as well as ways in which they would like to be involved. Assess their strengths and talents.</li> <li>• In each monthly newsletter, publish names and phone numbers of parents/families who are willing to talk with other parents/families about concerns and interests.</li> <li>• Make sure that the Parent Team is an ongoing problem-solving team by providing training sessions in creative problem solving and student-centered decision making.</li> <li>• Be thoughtful about times and dates of meetings (make sure that meetings/events are not scheduled around holidays, tests, etc.).</li> <li>• Make sure every meeting has a specific purpose—don't schedule meetings just to have meetings. Instead, make sure that all activities enhance student academic achievement and support psychosocial growth and development.</li> <li>• Couple business meetings with student performances or exhibits.</li> </ul>
<p><b>5. Transportation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrange transportation to and from meetings/events.</li> <li>• Work with system and central office to allow parents to ride the bus with their child for specific activities.</li> <li>• Move some meetings/conferences to community sites, e.g., malls, libraries, recreation centers.</li> </ul>
<p><b>6. Creating balance between male and female parent involvement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Look for gender balance on teams and subcommittees, as well as for special events such as speakers on career day or assistants on field day.</li> <li>• Always address notes home to males as well as females—if parents are living apart, send a separate note to each one.</li> <li>• In scheduling home visits, find a time when both parents can be available.</li> <li>• Invite "significant males" in the life of each student to become involved in some specific activity.</li> <li>• Encourage adult males to chaperone field trips and lead classroom activities.</li> <li>• Use inclusive language for volunteer positions ("room parent") as opposed to using traditional gender specific language such as "room mothers."</li> <li>• Use inclusive language to embrace diverse family configurations—instead of "mother's day" and "father's day," use terms like "family day" or "my male/female role model/significant other day" or "my special person day."</li> <li>• Refrain from judgment about families in which a child lives with only one parent or other family members.</li> </ul>
<p><b>7. Language</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have staff learn the languages of the families with whom they interact.</li> <li>• Have interpreters available for every meeting.</li> </ul>

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**Figure 10.8** People search

<p>The activity below is a sample of a People search. The format can be modified for many different purposes and settings. At every event involving staff and parents, include a team builder that connects to the event and encourages participants to really get to know each other. It is often easier to come back to school when you know others who will be there. Encourage the staff not to sit together, but to reach out to meet and greet families.</p>	
<b>Find and write the name of someone who . . .</b>	<b>. . . fills the following description:</b>
	. . . has been a room parent for his/her own child or has actively recruited room parents for his/her classroom.
	. . . has served on a PTA/PTSA/PTO/Parent Team.
	. . . has walked into a school office and been ignored.
	. . . has been offended by what was said about his/her child at a parent conference.
	. . . holds regular evening meetings with the families of their students. (These meetings are different from regular PTA.) Share how it was done.
	. . . is a teacher or parent who attends most of the PTA meetings at the school where he/she teaches.
	. . . has found meaningful ways to engage the families of students in school. (Explain.)
	. . . meets and greets parents/families in the morning when they drop off their children.
	. . . refrains from becoming defensive when parents/staff/students come in angry or upset.
	. . . has four or more children of his/her own (or children in three different schools).
	. . . always looks for the strengths of families and children.
	. . . accepts and respects families and/or school staff who are different from themselves in some way.
	. . . calls home/school with positive messages during the year.

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**Figure 10.9** Headbands or Hats

This activity is used in the parental/family involvement training module to make specific points about the effect of attitude and communication on staff/parent/family involvement.

1. Presenter prepares headbands by writing a phrase on each one. Use lettering large enough to be seen by all members of the audience. The phrases can be modified or expanded based on local needs. Some examples are:
  - Laugh at me.
  - Speak only Spanish to me.
  - Smile at me, but do not mean it.
  - Turn your chairs away from me.
  - Treat me as the parent leader.
  - Seek my opinion.
  - Listen very carefully to me.
  - Look at my feet when you speak to me.
  - Disrespect all my ideas.
2. Presenter puts headbands on volunteers, making sure that they do not see the phrase on their own hat and asking observers not to yell out the phrases.
3. Ask everyone who is not in the circle of volunteers to be an observer.
4. The volunteer group discusses a designated topic, for example, "What is ideal parent and/or family involvement?"
5. Encourage each volunteer to speak at least several times.
6. Time them (7 minutes). Then applaud and thank them.
7. At the end, the presenter addresses each volunteer one by one, asking the volunteer to guess what is written on his or her own headband before the volunteer takes it off and reads the phrase.
8. The presenter gives all volunteers a chance to give their reactions about what they were feeling during the discussion in Steps 4–6.
9. The presenter asks them to make any connections and observations related to parent/family involvement.
10. After the volunteers comment, invite additional observations from the audience.

SOURCE: Adapted from Perrin (1985), © National Association of Secondary School Principals. Used with permission.

**Figure 10.10** Promising practices for involving parents and families

<b><i>Building Relationships</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build relationships with parents, families, and students. Build on the strengths that families bring to school. Respect all families and parents, however they come to you.</li> <li>• Make all parents, families, staff, and students feel welcome in the school.</li> <li>• Know your community and identify its needs.</li> <li>• Make sure representative parents serve on the SPMT and all subcommittees.</li> <li>• Use a liaison to help make contacts with the community.</li> </ul>
<b><i>Adapting Events to Community Needs</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schedule meetings around the needs of the community and vary your times.</li> <li>• Schedule meetings around the master calendar of the school and the larger community.</li> <li>• Schedule meetings with substance that reflect the needs of the Comprehensive School Plan and that meet the needs of the community.</li> <li>• Obtain speakers who are role models for the community. Bring back graduates, etc.</li> <li>• Conduct bilingual meetings and training if appropriate. Send out written notices in different languages. Send positive notes and make positive calls.</li> <li>• Involve the students in the planned activities so they encourage their parents/families to become involved. Students can write invitations to their parents/families.</li> <li>• Arrange special transportation if needed.</li> <li>• At meetings, have nametags and sign-ins and have other parents, students, and staff serve as greeters at every meeting.</li> <li>• Provide babysitting. (Use older children and an adult, Girl Scout-type groups, staff members, etc.)</li> <li>• Start and end on time, taking no more than 1 1/2 hours.</li> <li>• Always include icebreakers. Split into different groups so everyone gets to know each other. Ask staff to sit in different places—not all together—and ask them to reach out and greet parents and families. Modeling matters.</li> <li>• Provide refreshments or snacks.</li> <li>• When holding big community school activities (carnivals, dinners, socials, and multicultural activities), intentionally build relationships and connect the activity to the needs identified in the Comprehensive School Plan.</li> </ul>
<b><i>Appreciating Parents and Families</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Send appreciation notes home to parents and families who help with school projects. Consider a thank you luncheon for volunteers.</li> <li>• Let parents and families know that they make a big difference. Make them feel that they are wanted and needed. Model positive behaviors. Be genuine in your relationships. Remember that there are real invitations and there are surface invitations.</li> <li>• Ask staff to identify one or two families that they know well to come into school to share what they think is going well, what is not going well, and what may need to be changed.</li> <li>• Appreciate parent/family involvement that includes the following:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A parent calling and asking questions</li> <li>A parent supporting the schools and teacher verbally at home</li> <li>Parents working with their children at home</li> <li>Parents reading to their children</li> <li>Parents providing concrete experiences for their children</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

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**Figure 10.11** Strategies to increase home-school cooperation

<p>These ideas have come from many places, including Columbus, OH, San Diego, CA, Prince George's County, MD, and from teachers and parents throughout the SDP network. We encourage you to go through your own process of identifying the barriers and challenges at your school, and brainstorm for solutions that your school community will support. Additionally, all activities and events need to be based on the Comprehensive School Plan and tied as much as possible to curriculum, instruction, relationships, and development.</p>
<p><b><i>Relationship-Building Strategies</i></b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invite a few key parents/families to a coffee hour with the principal and hold it at the home of the PTSA/PTO/Parent Team leader.</li> <li>• Invite several parents to sample the school lunch once a month. Seat them with the principal, teachers, and several randomly selected students.</li> <li>• Provide an opportunity for parents to get together with other parents to discuss school problems.</li> <li>• Encourage parents to meet with other parents to discuss school issues and then feed that discussion back through the Parent Team to the appropriate school team and/or committee.</li> <li>• Consider home visits—if not to the home, then to community centers. Be visible in the community. Make families feel that you like being in the community and working with them.</li> <li>• Set up a plan for the principal to make “house calls.”</li> <li>• Make sure your SSST is inviting and friendly to parents/families/students.</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>Communication and Information-Sharing Strategies</i></b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working with the Parent Team, create a “How Parents Can Help” handbook that gives practical suggestions and/or home activities such as making out grocery lists, taking nature walks, cooking and shopping together, planning and taking trips, helping to pay the bill at restaurants, etc.</li> <li>• Send home “happy grams” and other good news notes about accomplishments and achievements.</li> <li>• Establish a communication hotline for parents/guardians to check on nightly assignments and any events/activities.</li> <li>• Hold high school department seminars for parents/guardians to help them help their children get the most out of particular course offerings.</li> <li>• Establish regular visitation days for observation of classes and a chance for families to offer constructive suggestions.</li> <li>• In each month’s newsletter, publish the names and phone numbers of parents serving on teams and committees so other parents may contact them with ideas of interest or concern.</li> <li>• Suggest an evening a week when parents or students can telephone the principal at school to ask questions and discuss problems.</li> <li>• Encourage parents/families to praise their child’s successes.</li> <li>• Occasionally ask the student to have parents call the teachers rather than always having the teachers contact the parents.</li> </ul>

- Set up an idea exchange in the school newsletter. Ask parents and/or staff to send in ideas.
- Involve parents/families in discussions about middle school while their children are still in elementary school. Do the same for the transition from middle to high school.
- Meet with schools near you and exchange ideas among the Parent Teams and/or the SPMTs.
- Conduct surveys and provide families with research topics related to raising children in today's world.

***Event Planning Strategies***

- Vary the times for Open Houses—hold some in the afternoon, some in the morning, and some at night.
- Hold a “Senior Citizen’s Day” at the school, inviting grandparents and other older friends to the school. Provide transportation.
- Invite new staff and new families to take a tour of the district. Cover points of interest, local churches, facilities available in the area, places that could be used for field trips, boundaries of the attendance area.
- Arrange athletic and academic contests for parents to get together with other parents. Allow time afterwards for discussions about school programs.
- Have children prepare a luncheon for families, teachers, and themselves. Send handwritten invitations.
- Start “Saturday Clubs” at the school to provide enrichment programs, film showings, family recreational activities.
- During events involving food, such as a spaghetti dinner/ice cream social/international dinner/day, the key question is: While having everyone present, how will the staff interact with the families to deepen the relationships? How will the event be connected to the teaching and learning components?
- Other ideas for events include the following: male significant other/student or female significant other/student breakfast or luncheon, staff/parent dances, family movie night, health fair, curriculum showcase, dinner theater, book fair or book discussion clubs, holiday party, monthly grade-level programs, career day, carnival, yard sale or flea market with community, school beautification day, family showcase highlighting families, parent/guardian recognition day.
- Survey the needs of families. Consider setting up ESOL classes, GED classes, or community college extension courses at the school.

***Engaging Volunteers***

- Use parents/family members as field trip helpers and observers.
- Establish a classroom speaker’s bureau with parents or relatives of students sharing their experiences, hobbies, job information. You do not have to wait until Career Day.
- Recruit parents to spend an hour or two during the year to help in their child’s classroom or help in some way at home. Try not to overwhelm parents by expecting them to do everything.
- Use volunteers to serve as tutors.
- Ask families to help in the media center.
- Ask families to serve on all committees.

*(Continued)*

Figure 10.11 (Continued)

<i>Classroom Strategies</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set goals for each child with the child and parent together.</li> <li>• Set up parent conferences at a variety of times to meet the needs of the families you serve.</li> <li>• Have students interview their family members or parents about how life has changed since their childhood.</li> <li>• Involve students in the SDP process. Have them survey their families to collect ideas for improvement (working through the Parent Team and SPMT).</li> <li>• Assign homework that is relevant to the child's concrete world and will provide the practice a child needs to internalize new knowledge.</li> <li>• At Back to School Night, bring a suitcase or trunk with items that demonstrate who you are and what matters to you. As a way of introduction, unpack your trunk and share who you are, using your pictures, mementos, etc. Ask each family to introduce themselves to the others. Build a team on that first night. (The same could be done with your students.)</li> <li>• At the beginning of the year, take a picture of each student. By Back to School Night, display them with a large sign welcoming the families and guardians. Before that night, have the students write a note home inviting their parents to attend. This is a good idea in general—involving the students in encouraging their parents/families to participate in a variety of events by writing notes and also thank yous. Have students leave a special note in their desks for their parents the night of Back to School Night.</li> <li>• Put the names of all your students in a jar. Once a week, pull a name out and call that student's family, giving them a positive progress review. While you are speaking to the parents, share other information about upcoming events at school, etc. Nothing beats a personal invitation.</li> <li>• Some schools have a Family of the Month from every grade level. Children's names are drawn at random from every grade level each month. The children take home a Polaroid camera and take several pictures of their family and fill out a form that speaks to what the family enjoys and values.</li> <li>• Have students lead the open houses. Have the students stand before their parents on Back to School Night or open houses and explain what they are learning and why. They can also be the greeters.</li> <li>• Have students collect coupons from newspapers of at least 10 items needed at home. Ask the students to (1) go to the store with their families, (2) find the items on the coupon, (3) compute the cost with and without the coupon, and (4) compute the total savings.</li> <li>• During Fire Safety Week, ask students to draw the floor plans of their homes, locating all safe exits, and to speak with their families about this.</li> <li>• Invite parents and families in to learn ways they can work with math, science, language arts, and science while eating out, taking trips, watching TV together, cleaning up, etc.</li> </ul>

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**Figure 10.12** Key points to consider in organizing and maintaining an effective and dynamic home-school partnership

<i>An Effective and Dynamic Home-School Partnership . . .</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Includes all six types of involvement:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parenting</li> <li>Communicating</li> <li>Volunteering</li> <li>Learning at home</li> <li>Decision making and advocacy</li> <li>Collaborating with the community</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Reflects three levels of participation:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Level I: Broad participation and general support</li> <li>Level II: Active daily participation in the schools</li> <li>Level III: Participation in school management</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Is guided by a shared vision built upon policy.</li> <li>• Is well planned, comprehensive, and long lasting.</li> <li>• Is more than a series of events.</li> <li>• Provides activities that build upon each other to foster increasing degrees of involvement over time; activities are not one-time events.</li> <li>• Provides opportunities for all parents/families regardless of their literacy level or native language.</li> <li>• Is tailored to the specific school site population.</li> <li>• Fosters relationships between parents, children, and staff. Changes in the nature and amount of parent-child interaction have been linked to changes in child behavior and achievement.</li> <li>• Offers families strategies for connecting what happens at school to what happens at home in order to convey value for learning and support for student achievement.</li> <li>• Encourages partnerships among schools, families, and communities.</li> <li>• Enhances a successful program. DOES NOT substitute for good teaching.</li> </ul>

SOURCE: Courtesy of Bea Fernandez, Melissa Whipple, and Jeana Preston, Parent Involvement Department, San Diego City Schools.

To sum up, in Figure 10.12 we draw your attention to a list of factors (Parent Involvement Department, San Diego City Schools, 1997) essential to organizing and maintaining an effective and dynamic home-school partnership. Let these “key points” guide the work you do.

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- Parent Involvement Department of the San Diego City Schools. (1997). *Teamwork makes the dream work: Families and schools together*, Unpublished, Part 2, p. 8.
- Perrin, K. (1985). *National leadership camp: Leadership curriculum guide*. Reston, VA: National Association of Secondary School Principals, Division of Student Activities, pp. 8–10.

## READ MORE ABOUT . . .

- For a full discussion on children and schools, see “The School Is Preventive and Promotive,” Chapter 1 in *Six Pathways to Healthy Child Development and Academic Success: The Field Guide to Comer Schools in Action* in this series.
- For a bibliography of team-building exercises and ice breakers, see “Teaming and Team Building,” Chapter 9 in *Six Pathways to Healthy Child Development and Academic Success* in this series.

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