

Section 11.1: Parental & Community Involvement

6. Overview

There are many reasons for developing school, family, and community partnerships. They can improve school programs and school climate, provide family services and support, increase parents' skills and leadership, connect families with others in the school and in the community, and help teachers with their work. However, the main reason to create such partnerships is to help all your students succeed in school and later in life. When parents (i.e., any adult caregiver with primary responsibility for a student), teachers, students, and others view one another as partners in education, a caring community forms around students. This chapter and section covers the environment that you can put in place to encourage parents and the community to become involved with your school.

7. Checklist

Task	Timeline or Deadline	Submission Requirements and Additional Information
<input type="checkbox"/> Develop strategies to increase parental/community involvement.	Develop/review prior to the start of every school year	<i>Additional Information:</i> National Network of Partnership Schools' Model: www.csos.jhu.edu/P2000/center.htm
<input type="checkbox"/> Establish a parent/teacher group.	Optional, but recommended	<i>Additional Information:</i> National PTA: www.pta.org PTO Today: www.ptotoday.com
<input type="checkbox"/> Collect data about parents/families and parental involvement.	Optional, but recommended	

Develop strategies to increase parental/community involvement

There are a number of strategies that you can undertake to increase the chances of parental and community involvement with your school. Parents (and the community) are more likely to get involved when they:

- Feel welcomed and participation is accessible
 - Consider arranging for food, child care, and/or transportation. The time otherwise spent making food and on the bus is replaced with time to interact, nurture children, and create a community for a shared goal.
- Feel respected and acknowledged for their time and efforts
 - Parents' time is limited. Create an environment that is warm and offers dignity to every participant. Start meetings on time and run activities efficiently.
- Feel they are part of something meaningful
 - Think with parents about desired outcomes. Ensure together that the activity has a purpose with clear goals and positive outcomes. Do not bring parents in after an agenda is designed.
- Feel valued and useful
 - Individual parents often have contacts and strengths that the group does not have. Survey, gather resources, and fully utilize them.

Parents (and the community) stay involved when the school:

- Creates a space where parents feel safe, comfortable, and valued
 - Avoid token utilization of parents as an interest group. Bring out skills, critical thinking, and leadership opportunities for parents.
- Provides hands-on training and guidance

- Assess what skills are needed to accomplish agreed-upon tasks. Provide training and informal mentors, along with an explicit understanding of why and how each skill is necessary to the goal.
- Acknowledges efforts and inspires next steps
 - Take note of success. Clearly explain whatever steps remain for reaching the stated goals. Assess the challenges together and brainstorm solutions.
- Creates a sense of parent ownership in the change process
 - Facilitate parent planning at key junctures in the change process. Guide innovative parent ideas and new contacts into strategies throughout the process. Write up parent input.

Below is a list of suggestions for how your school might further cultivate parental and community involvement:

- Invite parents and the community in for creative “brainstorming” activities.
- Ensure that both fathers and mothers participate.
- Generate an intergenerational view of issues.
- Find ways to introduce parents to other parents and staff.
- Seek group and individual feedback.
- Record and review all input from parents throughout planning and implementation; use the feedback to inform next steps.
- Assess the skills and training needs of participating parents.
- Create tasks that truly utilize the assets and contacts of parents.
- Offer training to parents and staff members in the civic skills necessary to attain goals.
- Ask parents to take on specific leadership roles; develop environments where parents speak and lead meetings on specified issues.
- Minimize jargon. Use words that fully describe and bring purpose and spirit to the issue.
- Provide a wide variety of ways for parents to become involved (e.g., through small donations, by providing snacks, by assisting with tasks that can be performed at home).

National Network of Partnership Schools’ Model

The National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) is a researched-based program of school, family, and community partnerships developed through Johns Hopkins University and established in 1995 by Dr. Joyce Epstein. Dr. Epstein has developed a framework for defining six different types of parent involvement that has evolved from many studies and from many years of work by educators and families in elementary, middle, and high schools. This framework assists educators in developing school and family partnership programs. Dr. Epstein’s work also describes the challenges inherent in fostering each type of parent involvement as well as the expected results of implementing them for students, parents, and teachers. The following information is excerpted from Epstein's work. Additional information can be found at www.csos.jhu.edu/P2000/center.htm.

Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement and Sample Practices

1. **PARENTING**: Help all families establish home environments to support children as students
 - Parent education and other courses or training for parents (e.g., GED, college credit, family literacy).
 - Family support programs to assist families with health, nutrition, and other services.
 - Home visits at transition points to pre-school, elementary, middle, and high school.
2. **COMMUNICATING**: Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress.
 - Conferences with every parent at least once a year.
 - Language translators to assist families as needed.

- Regular schedule of useful notices, memos, phone calls, newsletters, and other communications.
- 3. VOLUNTEERING: Recruit and organize parent help and support.
 - School and classroom volunteer program to help teachers, administrators, students, and other parents.
 - Parent room or family center for volunteer work, meetings and resources for families.
 - Annual postcard survey to identify all available talents, times, and locations of volunteers.
- 4. LEARNING AT HOME: Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning.
 - Information for families on skills required for students in all subjects in each grade.
 - Information on homework policies and how to monitor and discuss schoolwork at home.
 - Family participation in setting student goals each year and in planning for college or work.
- 5. DECISION MAKING: Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives.
 - Active PTA/PTO or other parent organizations, advisory councils, or committees for parent leadership and participation.
 - Independent advocacy groups to lobby and work for school reform and improvements.
 - Networks to link all families with parent representatives.
- 6. COLLABORATING WITH COMMUNITY: Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development.
 - Information for students and families on community health, cultural, recreational, social support, and other programs or services.
 - Information on community activities that link to learning skills and talents, including summer programs for students.
 - Service to the community by students, families, and schools (e.g., recycling, art, music, drama, and other activities for seniors or others).

For schools wishing to pursue this model further, Epstein suggests forming an “Action Team for Partnerships,” which comprises 6-12 members:

- School principal
- 2-3 teachers from different grade levels
- Parent liaison
- PTA/PTO officer or representative
- Two students from different grade levels (with high schools)
- 1-2 community members
- Others who are central to the school’s work with families, e.g., school nurse, social worker, counselor, secretary.

The Action Team should conduct the following activities:

- Write a One-Year Action Plan with activities linked to selected goals in the school’s Schoolwide Plan.
- Integrate all family and community involvement activities conducted by teachers and school groups in the One-Year Action Plan.
- Recruit and recognize other teachers, parents, and community members for leadership and participation in family and community involvement activities.
- Implement, coordinate, publicize, and oversee the planned involvement activities.

- Monitor progress, assess the strengths and weaknesses of implemented involvement activities, document results, and resolve problems.
- Report progress to the school staff, PTA/PTO, local media, and other groups.
- Replace departing Action Team members.
- Continue improving the school's program of family and community involvement.

Establish a parent/teacher group

A parent/teacher group is a formal organization composed of parents, teachers, and staff that is intended to facilitate parental participation in a school. The goal of all such groups is to support their school, encourage parent involvement, support teachers, and organize family events.

Groups going by the acronyms PTA (Parent-Teacher Association) or PTSA (Parent-Teacher-Student Association) are part of the National Parent-Teacher Association (National PTA) with membership open to anyone who believes in its mission and purposes. Local groups doing similar work but that are unassociated with the state and national structure of the National PTA are often known as Parent Teacher Organizations (PTOs). A number of other acronyms are used as well.

The most notable difference between a PTA and other parent organizations is that a PTA is supported by a state and national PTA, and thus funds are also sent to these offices to help sustain the PTA program. A PTO is local and does not pay dues or other fees to a national umbrella organization. Roughly 25% of parent groups in the U.S. are PTAs, while the remainder are independent.

Organizational Structure

A PTA/PTO group generally consists of a board whose members may include a president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer. They may also include various specialty positions, such as hospitality or programs. The board typically governs the parent-teacher group by creating and voting on meeting dates, general meeting programs, etc.

A PTA/PTO group general meeting will consist of board members plus all parents, teachers, and staff who are members of the PTA/PTO. A general meeting usually includes an agenda, which helps to keep the meeting on track. An agenda will usually include the following:

1. Name of PTO
2. Meeting Date
3. Meeting Location
4. Call to Order
5. Review of previous meeting's minutes
6. Officer's Reports (President, Vice President, Secretary, etc.)
7. Committee Reports (e.g., fundraising, special events, policy, elections)
8. Principal's Report
9. Unfinished (Old) Business
10. New Business
11. Announcements
12. Adjournment

There may be a special event (such as a Family Reading Night, talent show, or musical performance) or a special speaker included in the general meeting as well.

Activities

PTA/PTOs encourage parent, teacher, and community involvement by providing programs that create such opportunities. These activities may include bicycle safety, drug awareness, energy conservation, reading programs, science programs, math programs, pedestrian safety, etc. PTA/PTO parents can get

involved by supporting their students, teachers, and staff, e.g., volunteering to be room parents to assist with class parties or field trips, helping set up at a carnival or health fair, or helping teachers and staff by making copies for the class. Teachers and staff can get involved by helping to plan events that encourage the education of the students, e.g., workshops, tutoring, or special family nights.

Collect data about parents/families and parental involvement

Gathering data about your students' parents and families is important as it provides you with information to both better address the needs of your students and their families and tap into the talents of your school community. It is also important to track your parental involvement data in order to gain an understanding of how well your program is working. Consider assigning someone on your staff to track this information.

8. Resources

The following resources may help you in developing your parental and community involvement strategies.

- The Student Support Center can assist you in developing your own parental involvement plan and activities.

Student Support Center
1003 K St NW, Suite 405
Washington, DC 20001
202-628-8848

- The DC Parent Information Resource Center (DC PIRC) provides leadership, coordination, and services that enable parents, educators, and the Washington, D.C. community at large to be partners and work collaboratively to improve student academic achievement and the quality of schools for all students through such partnerships. More information can be found at www.mcsdc.org/page14.html.

Multicultural Community Service
DC Parent Information Resource Center (DC PIRC)
2437 15th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20009
Main: 202-238-9355
DC PIRC Parent Helpline: 202-552-7175
Language Services Program: 202-299-9477
info@mcsdc.org
dcpirc@mcsdc.org

- SEDL has published a Parental Involvement Toolkit (www.sedl.org/connections/toolkit/toolkit-titleI-parent-inv.pdf) with a wealth of information including policy samples and template letters.
- Additional information on parent/teacher groups can be found at National PTA (www.pta.org) and PTO Today (www.ptotoday.com).
- See the Improve Your School – Volunteering & Fundraising section of the GreatSchools website (www.greatschools.org/articles/?topics=134&language=EN) for a collection of articles.