



Section G: Family and Community Involvement

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Introduction: Family and Community Involvement

This is the first edition of the Family and Community Involvement section. The section will be expanded in future editions of the tool kit. For more information about family involvement, please contact the Office of Family Involvement at 612-668-4158.

The table below forecasts the focus areas and tools in this section, and offers some practical tips for building leaders to implement in their schools.

Focus Areas	Role of Building Leader(s)
Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate with families about what is happening in school, in general, as well as what is happening with their child. • Talk to parents about the good things happening with their child, not just the bad. • Share ways that parents can contribute to their child’s learning. • Find meaningful ways to continue to involve parents at the secondary levels. • Ask parents how the school is doing and how their child feels about school. • Welcome parents to your school and show them respect. • Find ways to involve parents in celebrating your school’s ethnic diversity.
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage community members to be a part of the school through volunteerism. • Invite community volunteers to share their culture and traditions with students who may not be as familiar with them. • Use community volunteers in learning experiences, such as letter writing, community service, exploring the environment, map making, and ecological studies.



Focus Area: Family Involvement: Validate the Unseen

As a child moves through each grade of school, family involvement can increase that student's academic success. Family involvement improves student morale, attitude, behavior, and academic achievement.

Parents can show family involvement without ever stepping foot in the school building. Schools and building leaders should honor the three ways that families are actively involved:

- Doing a good job of parenting
- Teaching their child at home
- Communicating with their child and with the school

In other words, schools must validate those types of family involvement that aren't necessarily viewed by school staff. Family involvement takes different forms, from communicating with teachers to helping children with homework to participating in school committees.

Establishing systematic, ongoing family involvement is essential for a strong home-school partnership. Schools can develop partnerships in many ways; but there are several common elements that signal strong parental involvement on behalf of their students at school.

Strong family-school partnerships include the following common elements:

- Communication with families is a high priority. Consider communicating in non-traditional ways, especially because with many families literacy is an issue
- Families periodically and routinely are asked how the school is doing in meeting their children's education needs and how the school can be welcoming to families.
- Students and families are comfortable offering suggestions to staff and administrators.
- The school's actions and activities indicate respect for the ethnic diversity in the school.
- The school partners with other schools that share its language; parents are invited to language specific meetings across schools.
- The school offers opportunities for families to increase their own ability to become actively involved; e.g., helps families get the necessary information to make informed choices about schools.
- School staff is responsive and returns calls in a timely fashion, even when an answer is not readily available. Families know that staff care and are looking into their questions.



Focus Area: Different Ways Families are Involved in Education

Parents are involved in student learning in a variety of ways. The following image presents basic ways in which parents support learning. Each of these ways is good, but not all of them are necessary. Effective leaders can work with parents to understand how to be the best at those areas that are available to them:

- **Leadership in School Decisions**
- **Collaborating with Community**
- **Volunteering**
- **Communicating**
- **Learning at Home**
- **Parenting**

Parenting: All the things families do at home:

- Provide a home
- Provide food
- Provide clothing
- Talk to their children
- Read to their children
- Limit television time for children, and types of programs that children watch

Learning at home: Teach right from wrong

- Teach names of common items, colors, body parts
- Teach their children how to behave towards adults, other children
- Teach their children common concepts: under, over, beside, on top, on bottom, slow, fast

Communicating: Talking to teachers and school staff

- At school
- On the phone
- In the neighborhood
- Calling in to report absences when children are ill
- Informing teachers and school nurses of health concerns and problems with children
- Attending school conferences
- Attending PTA or parent groups meetings

Volunteering: Being part of the school PTA

- Coming to school to help with class work
- Going on field trips
- Reading to students in the class
- Sharing things from your culture in your child's classes : dance, music, art, food, customs

Collaborating with Community: Inform school of community resources that are available in your community

- Communicate school concerns to community programs and groups
- Celebrate school successes with community groups
- Inform employers of what is happening in your children's schools

Leadership in School Decisions: Agree to serve on PTA committees

- Agree to serve on School Site Based Management Team
- Agree to serve as a representative from school or community to district-wide committees
- District Parent Advisory Council, other committees (staff development, curriculum, gifted and talented, special education)

When parents are involved:

- Students do better academically
- Students are better behaved
- Students have pride in themselves, their school and their culture



Focus Area: Actions to Move Beyond Traditional Family/Community Involvement

What is family involvement?

Traditional	Reciprocal
School staff are generally the only ones who benefit from the involvement.	Everyone involved in the efforts benefits from the actions.

School/Family/Community Connections that are characterized by reciprocal interactions among students, school staff, family, and community members have greater benefits to all involved. The following table describes some of those most productive connections and possible outcomes that can be realized.

Types of Connections

Types of Connections	Definitions	Outcomes
<i>Fostering Supportive Home Environments</i>	is defined as strategies that assist families with parenting skills & help create home	Increased student academic achievement because students receive more support for classroom learning activities at home Greater knowledge and skill for family members about how to support their children not only academically but physically and emotionally
<i>Expanding Family, Community, and School Shared Decision Making</i>	is defined as strategies that include families and community members as partners in school decisions.	Enhanced family-school interactions that bring about improved relations among all those involved and support for the school's academic efforts Additional resources for school improvement efforts

<i>Coordinating Resources and Services</i>	is defined as strategies that unite efforts and programs to provide services for families, students, school, and community.	Greater support and use of existing outreach programs Additional resources for families and schools in their work to meet student needs
<i>Fostering Volunteer Support</i>	is defined as strategies that organize and support family and community members in their efforts to support the school and its students.	Greater support for student academic success and for school improvement efforts Positive perception of school staff, efforts, and programs
<i>Supporting Youth Development</i>	is defined as strategies that provide services for students, such as health and physical development, creative expression, and leadership development.	Greater support for students academically Deepened sense of student identity and the need for planning for the future
<i>Supporting Learning Outside of School</i>	is defined as strategies that involve families and partner organizations to support learning in a variety of settings other than the classroom.	Additional support for student learning and personal development that might lead to increased academic achievement Additional support and resources for school improvement efforts
<i>Expanding Community Development</i>	is defined as strategies that involve the school in community planning and decision making as a community institution, as well as create opportunities for the community to utilize the school's resources.	Greater support for school improvement efforts More positive relationship between school and community Greater access to additional facilities and resources

Schools that have effective family and community efforts commonly promote:

- ***Relationships*** among family, community members, and school staff that foster trust and collaboration
- ***Recognition*** for families' needs and class and cultural differences that encourage greater understanding and respect among all involved
- ***Involvement*** of all stakeholders in shared partnerships and mutual responsibility for student learning.

The following table provides a number of fundamental steps that can build strong relationships, recognize differences among families and community groups and involve large numbers of people in shared partnerships and mutual responsibility.

Take steps...	to make a difference...	by...
<i>Develop</i>	capacity of school staff to work with families and community members	Develop training
<i>Assist</i>	families in building their capacity for meaningful involvement	Sponsor dialogue/classes with parents on their “turf”
<i>Build</i>	strong connections between schools and community organizations	Involve students in providing performances or some other sort of contribution to the organization (visual art, work-related, etc.)
<i>Direct</i>	all planning and actions, whether based at school or in the community	Support the local library in providing resources for summer classes that relate to academic school year classes
<i>Design</i>	programs that will support families in guiding their children’s learning from preschool through high school	Sponsor college planning night at the community center.
<i>Include</i>	family involvement process in strategies to reduce the achievement gap among all students.	Use community centers, libraries, and other public places for meetings to engage families to discuss what is keeping students from succeeding in the home, neighborhood and the schools
<i>Concentrate</i>	efforts to develop trusting and respectful relationships with family and community members to foster meaningful partnerships that support student learning	Engage parents/community members in reading groups/discussion circles to talk about how to support students
<i>Promote</i>	a philosophy of partnership and be willing to share power with families	Involve family and community members as equals in planning and implementing monthly family math nights that support classroom instruction
<i>Build</i>	strong connections between schools and community organizations	Involve local service clubs to offer activities that encourage girls to reach high academic expectations

Source: *The National Center for Family & Community Connections with Schools* located at Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. To find out more about their work, visit <http://www.sedl.org/connections/>.



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Tool: Best Practices for Family Involvement

Identify a cross-section of 6–10 staff, parents and volunteers to serve on a committee to:

1. Assess and address the quality of the communication between the school and family
2. Determine current staff practices and challenges related to communication with families
3. Survey families to get their perceptions of the school, classrooms, and teachers. Ask questions about family involvement, such as best times to attend school meetings or events, communication needs, and other pertinent information
4. Involve students in the family survey process by explaining purpose and providing incentives for return of survey to the school
5. Report activities, progress, and outcomes to administration and school's leadership team on a monthly basis. Administration should attend committee meeting at least 2–3 times during the school year to answer questions, provide direction, and feedback

It is more effective to use a committee for family involvement instead of one individual:

- It conveys to all of the key stakeholders (staff, administration, families, students and volunteers) that family involvement is a high priority in your school.
- It brings more skill sets and perspectives to the planning and implementation process. (Seek representation from the various ethnic groups that are a part of your school.)
- It allows for a more dynamic exchange and development of ideas and strategies and provides more individuals to carry out activities.
- It does not overtax one individual who would have 2-3 other major responsibilities.

Family Activities

- Develop activity through family involvement committee, which should have diverse representation as described above. Seek additional input if needed.
- Plan activity based on results of family survey (e.g. time of day best for most parents).
- Communicate event far in advance of activity (3–4 weeks ahead).
- Communicate the event's purpose.
- Communicate event more than once and in more than one way. Use students, newsletter, flyers, earlier events, and phone calls.

Example of Best Practice for Family Involvement

- Provide refreshments or a meal. Food related to the specific cultures represented in the school is a good way to attract families.
- Provide childcare, if necessary.
- Provide transportation. Find a neutral location that would be a convenient pick-up spot for a number of your families.

- Create a sense of excitement about the event, especially if student performances are involved. Families will come to events if their children are involved in the activity in some way or if it is another event in which they may have interest.
- Make no assumptions about reasons families may not attend. Communicate with them regularly through direct conversations, phone calls and surveys to find out reasons for low attendance. Also ask them how they would like to be involved with their children's education.
- Involve students in the process. Help students understand the purpose of family involvement. Get them excited about it.



Tool: Parent/School Compact

MPS standards for family involvement and No Child Left Behind require Title I-funded schools to create a school/parent compact. The compact outlines how families, school staff and students will work together to ensure student achievement. The compact is *revisited annually* with families, students, teachers, and other school staff.

When developing or reviewing the parent/school compact it is helpful to consider:

- Focus on opportunities rather than problems.
- How does the school offer assistance to parents if the child is not meeting academic goals?
- How does the school support parents to become partners in their child’s education?
- Do parents know how they can support their child’s academic success at home?
- Does the school offer opportunities for parents and teachers to work together?

The compact should describe each stakeholder’s responsibilities for learning:

The school’s responsibilities: to provide high-quality curriculum and instruction in a supportive learning environment; to provide staff development activities in the value of family contributions; to communicate and work with parents as equal partners; to explain how parents can contact staff; to schedule at least one annual parent/teacher conference to discuss the parent/teacher compact; and, to conduct the annual Title I meeting at times that are convenient for parents to attend.

The teacher’s responsibilities: to explain their teaching approach, expectations, and grading system to students and their families; to report student progress frequently to parents; to communicate how parents can support what is going on in the classroom by volunteering in their child’s classroom or observing classroom activities.

The parents’ responsibilities: to monitor attendance, homework completion, and television watching; to let teachers know if their child has any problems with learning; to volunteer at school; and, to participate in the decisions about their children’s education.

The students’ responsibilities: to let teachers and family know if they need help; to read on their own and/or with their family every day; to work on their reading and math skills at home, using the materials the teacher sends home; and, to come prepared, on time, for class each day.

Compact tips:

Keep the compact items about equal in length for each party.

Don’t patronize (“I will make sure my child has a good night’s sleep, is clean and fed.”)

Offer specific suggestions, for example: “Limit video games/TV time” versus “Limit video games/TV to one game/program a day.”



Tool: Sample Parent/School Compact

School: _____

Student's name: _____

Grade: _____

Date: _____

Teacher: _____

Our school believes that families and school staff should work in partnership to help each student reach his/her highest potential. As partners we agree to the following:

As the principal/administrator, I agree to:

Create a welcoming environment for parents and students.	Maintain a positive and safe learning environment.
Maintain and foster high standards of academic achievement and behavior.	Provide appropriate in-service and training opportunities for teachers and parents on how they can build partnerships to support student achievement.
Provide information on how to maintain two-way communication between the home and school.	Conduct at least one annual parent/ teacher conference to discussion compact.
Conduct annual Title 1 meeting at various times.	Communicate the school's mission and goals to students and parents.

Principal/Administrator's Signature _____ Date _____

As the teacher (classroom & Title I), I will do these activities to promote learning:

Explain expectations, curriculum, assessments, and state standards to parents and students.	Regularly provide materials and suggestions to parent on how they can support their child's learning.
Create a supportive learning environment in which families are welcome partners and students can be successful.	Remain competent and current in subjects taught and in instructional methods and strategies.
Welcome parents as volunteers or when visiting my classroom.	Communicate frequently with parents regarding student's progress.
Be available to explain or answer questions.	Provide motivating and interesting learning experiences in my classroom.

Teacher's Signature _____ Date _____

As the parent, I will do these activities to promote learning:

Encourage my child to read (recipes, news, comics, etc.).	Attend school functions.
Limit TV time to ____ hour per day.	Get my child to school every day, on time.
Regularly eat a meal together (____ times per week).	Practice reading/math skills (____ hours/day).
Let my child's teacher know when my child is struggling.	Provide a quiet place for child to study and make sure homework is done.

Parent/Guardian Signature _____ Date _____

As a student, I will do these activities to promote learning:

Work as hard as I can on school assignments.	Come to school each day, on time and prepared.
Try to have a positive attitude toward others, school and learning.	Set aside quiet time for homework or reading. Amount of time will be _____.
Share with my family about school.	Ask my teacher questions when I don't understand.
Know and obey all school, classroom and bus rules.	Believe that I can and will learn.

Student Signature _____ Date _____



Tool: Guidelines for Soliciting Community Input

Community input can be solicited by various means including an interactive survey via your school website, a paper survey distributed in the neighborhood or at a school meeting, or through a focus group.

Identify the purpose of seeking community input. Make certain that it is clear and can be easily explained and understood. Keep all questions focused on that purpose.

Identify participants in the process. Diversify the composition of the group to ensure that you receive opinions from a cross section of the various community resources available that represent the diversity in your building.

Select a number that, again, is representative. Ten percent out of a possible 100 community representative groups is reasonable. You may check with MPS [Research, Evaluation and Assessment](#), 612-668-0570, for more specific information on representative samples.

Develop approximately 6–8 simple, clear questions that can best allow you to obtain the information you desire.

Decide on format of the questions, that is, whether they will require mostly “yes” or “no” responses, multiple choice, open-ended, or a combination.

Determine how responses will be tallied—by you, another staff person, by committee or by an outside entity. This decision may impact format. Open-ended questions require more time to tally but can also provide more personal and varied perspectives.

Decide how results will be communicated back to the participants and other critical stakeholders—staff, parents, or students in a timely manner.

Manage expectations. If gathering input on a controversial school or district-wide decision, be upfront with people about anticipated outcomes. Be realistic about how much of an impact their input can have on the situation (e.g., budget cuts, staff reassignment, etc.).



Tool: How to Organize and Connect with Community Resources

Visual Graphing Process to Plot School Services And Resources

Achieve!Minneapolis will work with ten district schools (and/or departments) to identify services and resources that are being provided to students (and/or staff) and will lead a visual graphing process to plot those services and resources. This work supports the ability of administrative staff to plan strategically around gaps and duplication of academic, youth development and support services for students. Information about services and resources will be entered into an Access database.

The consulting agency will also lead staff through a strategic planning process that considers what resources and services are currently being provided, where gaps or duplication exist, and planning to provide a continuum of services and resources to ensure that every child succeeds. Products for each school or department include: wall-size graph with overlays, paper-based and electronic Access reports, and a written strategic plan for resource development. For more information contact [Achieve!Minneapolis](#) at 612-455-1557.