

Aurora Public Schools

Family & Community

Involvement Guide

K-12



Aurora Public Schools
Division of Instruction
Diversity Education Office

AURORA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Dear Aurora Public Schools staff:

It's with great enthusiasm that I write this introduction to the *Family & Community Involvement Guide K-12*. You have already been working with the other three priorities of the Aurora Achievement Initiative. While I know that many schools are already implementing the family-and-community-involvement priority, this guidebook provides additional resources for your use. It also offers tangible examples of what schools throughout the nation are doing to increase involvement.

Why should we focus on our families and community? The answer is simple: increased student achievement. Research tells us that increased family and community involvement results in more completion of homework, more positive attitudes, better behavior, higher graduation rates, greater enrollment in higher education, and higher test scores regardless of ethnicity, gender or socio-economic status. Some research indicates that as much as 50 percent of a student's school performance links directly to parental support.

Family and community involvement is an area where all staff members can, and should, make an impact. The success of your school's family and community involvement depends on it; the success of your students depends on it.

While increasing this aspect of our Achievement Initiative will involve much work, I know it will also be enjoyable and will bring great rewards.

Keep up the good work!

Sincerely,


Robert D. Adams, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools

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Introduction

This document is intended to support the Family and Community Involvement section of the Aurora Public Schools *Achievement Initiative*. It does this by allowing the reader to envision accomplishment of the optimal conditions for family and community involvement in schools. Support is offered to make progress toward this vision.

There are four main sections to this document to match the four categories in the Family and Community Involvement page. Within each section you will find separate entries for elements in the Sustained Improvement category. The elements together form the goal of family and community involvement in the Aurora Public Schools. Each entry includes a real-life example of a successful school family/community involvement project at a United States school. The intent is to replace these examples with successful practices achieved in Aurora's own schools at a later date. Background information is offered concerning the importance of achieving each goal, hints for how to do this, useful tools that can be bought or printed from the Internet, and pitfalls to avoid during implementation. Links to other areas of the *Achievement Initiative* are provided. For those wishing to pursue the content in depth, additional resources are listed.

The *Involvement Guide* is intended to be a living, interactive document. Many of the Useful Tools and other resources listed are available on the Web. The URLs given were functional as of January 2004. Remember that the Web is a growing structure, and that URLs can change. For instance, the U.S. Department of Education is in the process of changing the ERIC system. The reader may need to update some URLs to reflect changes since the original citations were offered. Also as sites within the Aurora Public School District become more adept at involving their families and communities, local examples will replace the national ones given in the "What Does It Look Like?" sections.

At the back of this document are rubrics describing how progress would look as schools strive to become accomplished in each element. These rubrics are followed by a four-page Tracking Sheet. You can use this to follow your progress toward "Accomplished/meets highest expectations" in each element. Do this by putting a date in the box that represents your current status. Collect documents that support your improvement efforts and either attach them to the tracking sheets or create a portfolio of your school's growth in family and community involvement. As you move from left to right across the chart in each element, the dates you add will monitor your progress. Supporting documents might include records of contacts such as phone calls, copies of programs attended by families and communities, PTA and PTO minutes, and photographs of family and community involvement activities.

If you have any questions about this document, please contact Sen Pham or Jesús Escárcega in the Diversity Education Office at 303-365-7819.

Assessment/Evaluation and Planning

ELEMENT

A school continues to implement its strategies by:

Planning from current data on family and community needs, skills, and interests

A school regularly takes the pulse of families and the community through assessing needs, skills, and interests. Tools used to assess these areas are regularly reviewed to determine relevancy, and plans are made by analyzing and interpreting these current assessment tools.



WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

At Esko High School in Esko, Minnesota, parents helped students prepare an application for a \$25,000 interest-free loan to establish a school-based enterprise—an ice cream parlor. The students decided on this business after conducting an extensive community survey. The loan was granted by the county economic development organization, and a major ice cream company donated a franchise. Parent, students, and other community members worked together to construct the ice cream parlor, which is called the “SCOOP.” It is now the source of renewed local pride.

The purpose of the “Be Cool, Pack the School” attendance campaign at South St. Paul (MN) High School is to increase student attendance by educating students, parents, staff, and the community about attendance issues. A school-community task force on attendance concerns conducted a needs assessment that indicated that parents do not understand attendance procedures. For example, parents often forget to send notes when students are absent, misunderstand legal issues, and are uninformed about guidelines to help determine if the student should (or should not) go to school. Incorporated into the campaign were communication pieces to educate and inform parents, students, teachers, and the community.

WHY DO IT?

Needs assessments have long been important community development tools. Needs assessments are both a process and a method. As a process, they can build leadership, group cohesion, and a sense of local ownership and involvement. As a method, needs assessments are tools to help a community plan for and implement strategies. They can identify unmet community needs, provide evidence of support for policy options, and increase public involvement in policy making.

HOW CAN IT BE DONE?

There is a four-step process for conducting a needs assessment.

1. Conduct a “gap” analysis.
 - a. Develop an accurate description of the current situation.
 - b. Describe the desired situation.
 - c. Find the difference between a and b. This is the gap. It can be used to identify needs, problems or deficits, or impending change. Looked at positively, this gap shows opportunities, new directions, and strengths.
2. Set priorities among needs, considering importance to goals, realities, and constraints. Remember that perceived needs may be wants, not actual needs.

3. Identify potential sources of challenges and growth opportunities in meeting priorities that have been identified.
4. Identify possible solutions.
 - a. Use the data collected to support suggestions for solutions.
 - b. Share suggestions and compiled data with everyone you collected data from. This helps establish “buy in”.
 - c. Be sure to consider costs and benefits when making suggestions.
- If possible, use multiple methods of needs assessment. You will get a truer picture if you collect many viewpoints from various sources of information. There are many possible techniques for needs assessments, including:
 - Direct observation;
 - Questionnaires;
 - Interviews;
 - Focus groups;
 - Tests; and
 - District records and reports.

USEFUL TOOLS

The following assessment resources are designed to take the pulse of family and community needs and interests in both elementary and secondary schools.

- *Educators’ guide to collecting and using data: Conducting focus group research* and *Educators’ guide to collecting and using data: Conducting surveys*

These two booklets give short and succinct information about the collection of family and community information. These booklets can be ordered for \$5.00 each (printing cost) from RMC Research Corporation by calling 1-800-922-3636.

- *Community education*

A sample of a survey used in a Wisconsin school district is found at <http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/dlcl/bbfcsp/doc/cesurvey.doc>. A “Community education assessment rubric” from the same source is found at <http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/dlcl/bbfcsp/pdf/rubric.pdf>.

- *Community education toolkit: Needs/resource assessment and planning*

To measure the effectiveness of a community needs assessment, the Wisconsin Department of Education provides objectives and measurement criteria at <http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/dlcl/bbfcsp/cetoolna.html>.

PITFALLS TO AVOID

- When conducting surveys try to keep them short and simple so that answering the questions won’t take too much time.
- If possible, include return postage when mailing surveys to ensure that a higher response rate.
- If you collect data from parents regarding their interests, be sure to take their interests into account when planning school projects and events.

HOW DOES IT LINK TO THE ACHIEVEMENT INITIATIVE?

This element links directly to the “Instruction and High Standards of Student Work” priority. While collecting and evaluating formative data (“Assessment and Evaluation”), teachers will find that family information can be valuable to plan instruction that is relevant to their students.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

The following resources will be helpful for those who would like to learn more about this element:

- *School and Family Involvement Surveys* found at <http://www.ncrel.org/cscd/sfi/>

This Web site links you to research-based resources identified by the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL). The site itself is a valuable resource; it lists a set of questions to ask about a particular survey to determine its suitability for your intended use.

- *Needs Assessment Tools* found at <http://nnlm.gov/ner/nesl/9410/tol.html>

This Web site provides a brief discussion of various types of needs assessments tools, including surveys, interviews, and records analysis.

- *Needs Assessment Decision Aid* found at http://mime1.marc.gatech.edu/MM_Tools/NADA.html

This useful Web site allows you to choose wisely among three common formats for needs assessments: questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups. Advantages and disadvantages of all three are listed.

- *Using Data to Bring About Positive Results in School Improvement Efforts* found at <http://www.ncrel.org/toolbelt/tutor.htm>

This Web site is about the entire process of data-driven decision making. The authors present a more formal eight-step approach to problem solving that includes posing hypotheses, analyzing data patterns, and defining evaluation criteria for the improvement process.

ELEMENT**A school continues to implement its strategies by:****Maintaining effective resources**

A school maintains effective resources at the building level. Specific staff members are identified for particular family and community involvement tasks. Family members are identified as potential resources based on the assessment of needs, skills, and interests.

**WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?**

Western Middle School in Louisville, Kentucky, runs a Youth Service Center that is staffed by a parent support coordinator and a home/school coordinator. Center staff members run all after-school programs and activities and refer students and parents to various community resources. Approximately 90 percent of Western Middle School students visit the center each school year. In addition, the Right Question Project at the school provides school staff members with training on how to structure their parent involvement activities and how to train parents to be better advocates for their children.

WHY DO IT?

Research shows that in order for schools to be successful in creating bridges between themselves and families, and themselves and the community, the effort must involve all staff members—not just the parent coordinator, liaison, or principal. The effort must also be conscious, sustained, evaluated, and adjusted to meet changing school, family, and community needs.

Research also indicates that resources must be given to the parent involvement effort in order for it to succeed. This is documented in the case study of Minneapolis Public Schools' Volunteer Services/Family Partnerships program (www.ed.gov/pubs/SER/ParentComm/minneap.html). It was shown that, in the absence of funding, policy mandates provided only minimal support for the program.

HOW CAN IT BE DONE?

When assigning staff to work with parent involvement:

- Use volunteers whenever possible.
- Select teachers who have experience working with parents and families, or provide appropriate training.
- Choose teachers who have adequate time to devote to parent involvement activities.
- Be sure selected teachers have a respectful attitude toward parents from all cultures.
- Provide incentives or special recognition to staff who help parents and families.

When using parents and community members as resources:

- Be specific when asking for resource assistance. Know exactly what you want before you ask.
- Be polite. Explain what you are looking for as clearly as possible.
- Don't apologize for asking for resources.
- Recognize parents and community members who help your school in newsletters and at special events.

USEFUL TOOLS

The following resources are designed to increase family and community involvement in both elementary and secondary schools:

- Kretzmann, J. P., & McKnight, J. L. (1993). *Building communities from the inside out: A path toward finding and mobilizing a community's assets*. Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University.

This excellent guidebook describes in detail a method for uncovering a community's assets and capacities. It also details how to build relationships among community members and organizations. Available from ACTA Publications, 1-800-397-2282, for \$25.

- Renzulli, J. *The enrichment triad model*.

The "Community Talent Miner", a survey tool to find community resources, is an appendix in this book, often available from coordinators of gifted and talented education. The document can be copied and reproduced with permission already granted by the author. The book is available from Creative Learning Press <http://www.creativelearningpress.com> for \$9.95.

PITFALLS TO AVOID

- When hiring teachers or paraprofessionals for positions involving parent contact, make sure that they receive high quality professional development in skills involving issues of culture and equity and that they possess good communication skills.
- When family members are recruited for projects and positions based on the assessment of their needs, skills, and interests, provide the training necessary for them to succeed.

HOW DOES IT LINK TO THE ACHIEVEMENT INITIATIVE?

This element links directly to the "Instruction and High Standards of Student Work" priority. Parents can contribute to the resource-rich environments ("Learning Context") that are a characteristic of successful classrooms.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

The following resources give more detail and further information:

- *Finding community resources manual* found at http://www.nwrel.org/ruraled/publications/com_community.pdf

This NWREL manual, written for rural schools, is applicable to all US schools.

- *Families with special needs children: Community resources* found at <http://www.answers4families.org/family/parentsjournal/comm.html>

For an example of how to use the Web to find community resources, in this instance assistance for families with disabled children, visit this site.

ELEMENT

A school continues to implement its strategies by:

Including collaboration with the wider community

A school maintains effective resources in the community. Businesses, corporations, churches, and service organizations are identified and investigated as possible partners using a variety of strategies such as personal visits, phone calls, and surveys.



WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

Volunteers enrich student learning in the Boise (ID) School District. More than 8,000 adults contribute 120,000 hours each year to the district's 27,000 students. One avenue for volunteers is the Partners in Education program that brings corporate, government, and university volunteers into Boise schools to match school needs. Each school's Partners team consists of a principal; a teacher; and a representative of parents, business, and postsecondary education. Teams design activities to benefit the school and volunteer organizations. Corporate and university personnel lead field trips, give classroom demonstrations, provide job shadowing and career awareness activities, and conduct teacher workshops. In addition they donate materials and funds to schools. In turn, the schools display student artwork at company sites, help Partners participate in community activities, tutor volunteer organizations' employees and their families, and boost employee morale.

The Family Resource Center in Columbus, Ohio, was developed to integrate and coordinate activities and services to families. It was opened with the understanding that more extensive efforts must be made to build relationships with school families, and that school families should play an integral part in the planning and implementation of school programs in addition to providing extended learning at home. The Family Resource Center is located in a subdivision near one of the 17 elementary schools in the district. It is open Monday through Wednesday from 8 a.m. until 8 p.m., and on Thursdays from 8 a.m. until 6 p.m. The coordinator of Federal and Staff Programs staffs the center, along with a Family Resource Center manager, Parent Coordinator, and an Even Start coordinator. The following programs have been provided for families at the Family Resource Center: well-baby/well-child checkups, Even Start, Head Start, counseling, free immunizations, health insurance for children, car seat program, Title I lending library, speech and hearing services, family and child guidance centers, Parents as Teachers, First Link, parenting workshops, craft nights, classes in adult basic education (ABE) and general educational development (GED), and a computer lab.

WHY DO IT?

Student learning is improved when lessons are rich in context and relate to the students' reality. One way to accomplish this is to use community resources. These resources could be people, places, or things.

HOW CAN IT BE DONE?

Follow an eight-step process for developing and sustaining effective school-community partnerships. These steps are:

1. Determine your rationale and conduct a needs assessment;
2. Develop a "school needs" profile that includes a description of your school and a list of needed resources;
3. Identify potential community partners;
4. Determine what your school can provide to partner organizations—it's a two way street;
5. Contact your potential partners using phone calls or letters to request a meeting;

6. Work with volunteers so that they feel welcomed—and train them thoroughly;
7. Communicate with and recognize your partners; and
8. Track and assess your partnerships to determine how partnerships can be improved and expanded.

There are many ways local businesses can support schools. These include:

- Support employees who need to attend parent conferences and other significant school activities during the work day;
- Highlight the involvement of parents and other employees in local schools in your internal and external communications; and
- Provide lunchtime educational seminars and other educational information to your employees.

USEFUL TOOLS

These resources will help to encourage positive family and community partnerships:

- *Help at last: Developing effective school-community partnerships*

This booklet contains tools and forms to guide schools through the entire eight-step community partnership process. Available from RMC Research 1-800-922-3636 for \$5.00 (printing costs).

- *The community as a resource: Program planning for the elementary school.* ED139693

This 62-page handbook provides ideas and strategies for developing and using community resources in elementary and secondary school programs. The section on program planning includes: assessing objectives in using community resources; matching resources to school needs; techniques for contacting the community; selecting, using, and evaluating the resources; and keeping records. Available from ERIC Document Reproduction Services 1-800-443-3742 for \$22.80 for a paper copy, or \$2.36 for microfiche.

PITFALLS TO AVOID

- When soliciting resources from businesses, corporations, or higher education, stress what your school can do for them as well as the help you would like. This creates an atmosphere of partnership rather than simply charitable contribution.
- Be sure that the school presents partners with appropriate symbols of recognition and appreciation. Thank you notes from students and teachers, an awards ceremony, or an appreciation pot luck are all possibilities.

HOW DOES IT LINK TO THE ACHIEVEMENT INITIATIVE?

This element links directly to the “Instruction and High Standards of Student Work” priority. The community is a good source of alternative materials to support content instruction (“Resources”), and of classroom opportunities for meaningful interaction on varied topics (“Learning Context”).

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

The following resources will be helpful for those who would like to learn more about this element:

- Dietz, M. J. (Ed.). (1997). *School, family, and community: Techniques and models for successful collaboration*.

This book provides research-based proven practices for collaboration among parents, schools, and communities. A partnership framework is derived from the research. Detailed descriptions of 25 effective programs are given. Available from Jones and Bartlett, 1-800-832-0034, for \$62.95.

- *Community resources in rural schools*. ED328370.

This 108-page yearbook includes chapters on ways to develop community resources; using community resources for curriculum development, and ways to use community resources for African-American and Spanish-speaking students. Although created in 1939, this document is available from ERIC Document Reproduction Services for \$38 for a paper copy or \$2.36 for microfiche.

ELEMENT

A school continues to implement its strategies by:

Annually renewing its strategies

A school consistently develops and implements strategies to address family and community needs in their School Improvement Plan. These strategies are reviewed annually and revised to meet current needs and plans. Resources are reallocated to meet these revised strategies.



WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

Whitman Elementary School in Tacoma, Washington, is a nationally recognized Title I site. The school addresses several successful strategies in its School Improvement Plan that contribute to student success. First, Whitman's "Kindergarten and Parent Program" identifies students of greatest need, provides them individual attention in the classroom, and makes weekly home visits to train parents in academic activities. In addition, the school maintains a partnership with the Child Guidance Program, a nonprofit service organization. One of the efforts of the partnership is the "F.A.S.T. Program," a grant funded cooperative effort that identifies the 10 neediest families and teaches them school dynamics, such as how to speak and work with teachers.

WHY DO IT?

Parents, teachers, and students have different perceptions of family and community involvement in schools. It is important to consider these multiple perspectives when creating a strategic plan.

HOW CAN IT BE DONE?

Although a small group of parents is usually heavily involved in giving input for the School Improvement Plan, all families can be involved. A simplified version of the plan can be sent home with a letter that welcomes input based on two or three carefully framed questions. For those families who would like to offer written input or comments, a short response form should be provided. This response form can be returned to the school by a family member or by mail. For those who favor oral responses, a meeting can be scheduled to receive feedback and comments from families.

- Adopt clear written district policies on family involvement, and support them.
- Align personnel policies with district policies on family involvement.
- Prepare staff and parents to work together.
- Use varied communication media and strategies for informing parents and community
- Provide staff development to increase students' opportunities to learn at home and in the community.
- Create family centers in each school.
- Give family and community members full decision making responsibilities as members of school and district action teams.
- Expand informed parental choice within the district.
- Develop agreements with community support services (health and social services) to collaborate with the schools to provide services to families.

USEFUL TOOLS

The following tools are helpful in addressing this element:

- “Guide for devising a workable strategic plan”

A checklist for evaluating and revising a strategic plan can be found at <http://www.omhrc.gov/clas/sec3ck4.htm>

- “Resources for family and community involvement in schools”

Research summary on impacts of family and community involvement on student achievement, effective strategies to connect schools, families, and communities, and parent and community organizing efforts to improve schools, along with recommendations for putting these research findings into action is found at <http://www.sedl.org/pubs/sedletter/v10n03/resource.html>.

PITFALLS TO AVOID

- When involving families and the community in any School Improvement Plan activities, make sure appropriate training is conducted to ensure that their input is of high quality.
- Before allocating or re-allocating resources for family involvement, check laws, policies, and procedures to make sure all guidelines are followed.

HOW DOES IT LINK TO THE ACHIEVEMENT INITIATIVE?

This element links directly to the “Leadership” priority. As the principal and other educational leaders work on the School Improvement Plan (“Planning”), much of the data they will need will come from parents and other community members.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

The following resources will be helpful for those who wish to learn more:

- *Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher: 1998.*

Metropolitan Life does annual surveys of teacher attitudes and opinions. The subtitle of this survey is “Building family-school partnerships: Views of teachers and students.” Summarizing the data collected about teachers’ perceptions of parental involvement in education, teachers want increased participation, they are positive about their relationships with parents, and they believe parents are more available than they were 10 years ago. In this study, students were also surveyed about their perceptions of their parents’ involvement. Those students who have lower achievement believe their parents have less interest in their education and are less involved in school. Available at <http://www.metlife.com/WPSAssets/17708507701018400922V1Flifesurv-98.pdf>.

- *Community for Learning Program*

This program shows schools how to improve student achievement, particularly for marginal students; increase effective classroom practices; and improve student and staff attitudes about school. The study also shows a positive pattern of changes in scores, and that Community for Learning students outperformed comparison students on both mathematics and reading. Families and the community

became increasingly active in a wide range of school activities and in school decision making processes. For more information, contact Margaret Wang at the Laboratory for Student Success at Temple University, at lss@vm.temple.edu or 1-800-892-5550.

Leadership/Partnership Opportunities

ELEMENT

A school's family and community involvement is visible and reflected in:

Families assuming leadership roles in the design, development, and implementation of future goals and programs

A school provides a wide range of opportunities for families and community to understand and jointly develop the design and implementation of school improvement strategies and future goals and programs. These opportunities are extended to the review and annual renewal of these strategies. A school's family and community involvement is visible in families assuming leadership roles in these processes.



WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

Daniel Webster School in Redwood City, California, has involved parents in goal setting and decision making processes. The school showed significant gains in student achievement compared to other schools in the district. Webster students increased California Test of Basic Skills math scores by 10 percentile points, and most classes increased language scores by at least 10 percentile points. A key element of the school is an organizational model that promotes broad participation by administrators, teachers, and parents.

WHY DO IT?

Family members can often continue to assess program success by reporting how various program components were received and understood by students. Research shows that people support what they help to create. Involvement in goals and programs increases family ownership in school processes.

HOW CAN IT BE DONE?

- Consider involving parents in sessions that show how data is used for decision making in schools and involving them in the actual data disaggregation process.
- At Back to School Night or other open house event consider having parents present a short session on test score results and school improvement goals to other parents.
- Hold a workshop for parents to help them understand the educational jargon associated with standards-based education.
- A leadership development process (Moore, 2002) used by the Orange County Congregation Community Organization follows six steps:
 1. One-on-one conversations between a facilitator and community members serve as an initial needs assessment. In addition, interested parents are identified for inclusion in the leadership development group.
 2. A small group of the most interested parents meets to choose an issue, from among those identified in the needs assessment, to focus on.
 3. A facilitator trains these parents on how to reach people in positions of power, for example, the school superintendent. Parent leaders also devise a list of questions for research on the issue. At this stage, the leadership group is planning its strategy.
 4. The one-on-one process is used again to gain community support for the proposed strategy.

5. The parent leadership group, who have been trained in and practiced communication techniques, takes the issue public in the presence of the identified person in power, perhaps the director of elementary curriculum. They present the issue surfaced by the needs assessment, the results of their research, and personal testimonies from individual parents or community members. The intent is to obtain a promise of action from the person in power.
6. After the public meeting, the leadership group evaluates the outcome of the public meeting. They discuss what worked and what didn't, and plan next steps.

USEFUL TOOLS

The following tools help parents become involved in leadership at the school:

- Ellis, D., & Hughes, K. (2002). *Partnerships by design: Cultivating effective and meaningful school-family-community partnerships*.

Available at <http://www.nwrel.org/partnerships/cloak/booklet-one.pdf>, this practical tool provides forms, worksheets, and activities to help you write a school-family-community partnership plan, including:

- Assessing current collaboration status;
 - Creating a vision for partnerships;
 - Defining goals and objectives for the partnership;
 - Designing partnership activities; and
 - Evaluating and revising the partnership plan.
- *Pathways To Parent Leadership / Senderos A Un Liderazgo De Padres*
- This is a bilingual report produced by [Action Alliance for Children](http://www.actionallianceforchildren.org). It describes nine successful California programs that train parents to be leaders in schools and communities. The report details how these programs listen to parents, support the "whole parent," foster ongoing connections, and build educational partnerships. It includes information about the leadership training curricula, program participants and outcomes, and key factors in each program's success, as well as an annotated list of resources. Both Spanish and English titles are available in the Resources section at <http://www.4children.org/>.

PITFALLS TO AVOID

- ➡ Don't make the mistake of thinking that family members cannot contribute to school improvement planning. They often have valuable insights because they see schooling from a different perspective than do educators.
- ➡ When asking families to help in the development and renewal of school improvement strategies, be sure to provide them with any materials they may need in this process well ahead of time.

HOW DOES IT LINK TO THE ACHIEVEMENT INITIATIVE?

This element links directly to the "Leadership" priority. For parents and other stakeholders to understand the School Improvement Plan as it is implemented ("Planning"), they must be involved in the development of the Plan.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

The following resources give more detail and information on involving families in a leadership role:

- Moore, I. (2002). *Orange County: Step-by-step leadership development*. This article defines the process for parental leadership development used by the Orange County Congregation Community Organization (OCCCO). Parents usually enter this program through their church. Available at <http://216.173.248.173/news/702picoe.htm>.
- Leighninge, M., & Niedergang, M. (1995). *Education: How can schools and communities work together to meet the challenge?*

A multi-session discussion guide on educational challenges and how communities and schools can work together to meet them. Available from the Study Circles Resource Center, 1-860-928-2616, for \$5.

ELEMENT

A school's family and community involvement is visible and reflected in:

Community partnerships which strengthen families and support student achievement

A school provides a wide range of opportunities for families and the community to support student achievement. This is visible in community partnerships that exist for the purpose of strengthening families and supporting achievement.



WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

Staff members at Highland Elementary School in Salem, Oregon, are aware that home-school connections are vital to improving student achievement. They utilize community volunteers to work one-on-one with children. These volunteers come to the school from “anywhere they can be found” and become responsive audiences and cheerleaders for the school’s young readers. The success of this program is astonishing. In only two years the percentage of students meeting the Oregon benchmarks in reading went from 19 percent to 80 percent.

Learning compacts are pledges that define the expectations and mutual responsibilities of schools and parents as partners in student success. In Minneapolis, “covenants” are signed by the students, a parent or other significant adult, a teacher or other school staff person, the school superintendent, a school board member, and community members. Each promises to work in specific ways to further the student’s education. Such pledges are seen as a first step to further actions by each participant.

In a low income neighborhood around Junior High 117 in East Harlem, many residents do not speak English, and therefore were uncomfortable around school staff. A community education program taught them leadership and decision making skills, after which the school’s advisory council and students’ parents participated in many more school decisions.

WHY DO IT?

A research summary written by the San Diego County Office of Education (1997) shows that families have four important roles to play in their children’s learning: teacher, supporter, advocate, and decision maker. Research by Henderson and others is cited regarding characteristics of families whose children succeed in school. The first step for schools to assist families in adopting these characteristics is informing parents.

HOW CAN IT BE DONE?

- Assume that all families can help improve their children’s performance in school and influence other key outcomes that affect achievement.
- Refrain from blaming families for their children’s low achievement.
- High expectations should apply to everyone involved with school—students, teachers, school staff, and families.
- At every conference with families, ask about their expectations for their children’s education. Make sure their children are enrolled in the program and taking courses that will prepare them for their desired future.
- Create programs that support families as they guide their children’s learning from preschool through high school. Adopt features of programs that are linked to gains in student achievement. Work with

families to support children in making transitions, whether from home to school, or to a new school setting.

- Work with families to develop connections with other parents and with teachers. Help families develop the knowledge and skills needed to work within the educational and social system.
- Develop or adopt programs to engage parents in working with their children to develop specific academic skills. Use features of programs that research has linked with achievement gains.
- Build strong connections between schools and community organizations. This will expand the resources available to schools both for staff and families.

USEFUL TOOLS

These tools will help family and community involvement become an integral part of any school.

- *A New Wave of Evidence*

For examples of programs that support family guidance, at early childhood, elementary, middle, and high school levels, see this document at <http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/evidence.pdf>.

- *What Your Community Can Do to Support Schools and Family Involvement in Education*

For this list of suggestions from the Family Involvement Partnership in Learning, see <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/PFIE/community.html>.

PITFALLS TO AVOID

- ☞ When a school building is shared by a number of organizations in the community, several issues arise. A plan must be developed for coordinating activities, providing additional maintenance services, and establishing procedures for the use of materials and equipment.
- ☞ When establishing partnerships with community organizations, be sure that you specify how the school can help the organization rather than expecting community groups to do all the “giving”.

HOW DOES IT LINK TO THE ACHIEVEMENT INITIATIVE?

This element is an extension of the “Leadership” priority on focusing on learning (“Role”). Family and community member leaders will focus their efforts on children’s improved achievement through their support of improved instruction.

This element is also an extension of the “Instruction and High Standards of Student Work” priority. Family and community members who have become leaders will support teachers’ growth in all categories as they progress from Implementation through Refinement and Sustained Improvement.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

The following resources will be helpful to those who would like to learn more about this element.

- San Diego County Office of Education. (1997). *Parent involvement and student achievement*.

This summary of research and related literature about family involvement for student success is available at <http://www.sdcoe.k12.ca.us/notes/51/parstu.html>. It discusses appropriate roles for the family in a child’s learning, and offers a list of characteristics of families with successful students,

including having family routines, modeling self-discipline, and holding high but realistic expectations for the child's achievement.

- Riley, R. W. (1997). *Better Education is Everybody's Business*.

This summary provides information about goals and projects of the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education (PFIE). Exemplary programs cited range from indoor recess programs to adopt-a-school projects.

- U.S. Department of Education. (2000). *Better education is everybody's business! How business can support family involvement in education*. ED462161.

This pamphlet describes how businesses can support family involvement in education and thereby increase students' chances for school success. It outlines materials available from the U.S. Department of Education that provides guidelines on getting families involved in education. The pamphlet also describes four ways employers can support family involvement in education: create and promote family-friendly policies; partner with local schools; provide information on family involvement in education; and help students obtain work-related skills. The book is available in printable electronic format by accessing www.edrs.com and requesting ED462161 for \$6.30.

- Dorfman, D., & Fisher, A. (2002). *Building relationships for student success*.

This booklet highlights examples of successful partnership strategies, drawn from current research and the school experiences of the authors. Available at <http://www.nwrel.org/partnerships/cloak/booklet2.pdf>.

ELEMENT

A school's family and community involvement is visible and reflected in:

Trained family and community leaders training other potential family and community leaders

A school provides a wide range of opportunities for families and community to develop as leaders and share their knowledge and skills to support the school. It is made visible and is reflected in a training of trainers model where trained family and community leaders train others to take leadership roles in the school.



WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

At a school in Boston, Massachusetts, parents train other parents to set learning goals with students. These goals are formalized into learning contracts and are signed by students, parents, and teachers at the school's parent center, a less intimidating place than at teachers' desks. This center holds discussions for staff to learn parents' cultures and for parents to learn about the school's programs. Finally, teachers and parents form teams to resolve conflicts between families and the school.

In Kentucky, the state PTA and the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence have become partners. Together, they have created the Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership (CIPL). CIPL has trained over 300 parents across the state. To become CIPL fellows, parents must commit to attending three two-day training sessions, offered in different regions of the state. They also agree to design and carry out a project in their local community.

WHY DO IT?

Research shows that, as parents and community members assume new roles and responsibilities, especially those that involve making decisions, they need training to function successfully. Successful district-wide parent involvement programs provide systematic training for parent leadership development. This is documented in the case study of Minneapolis Public Schools' Volunteer Services/Family Partnerships program (www.ed.gov/pubs/SER/ParentComm/minneap.html).

HOW CAN IT BE DONE?

The training-of-trainer dissemination model is very cost-effective, and has been found to be a strong professional development model. First a leadership group is selected to become trainers. They receive information about adult education principles, effective communication strategies, and techniques for designing professional development experiences. An expert is engaged to provide the leaders with not only the content of his or her expertise, but also some effective methods for passing the information to others. The leaders, once trained by the expert consultant, are expected to provide contextualized professional development or training to their peers.

USEFUL TOOLS

The following resources give more detail and further information.

- Henderson, A. T., Jones, K. & Raimondo, B. *The power of parent partnership: Setting a high standard for parent involvement projects will boost student achievement.*

This article describes the evaluation of a state-wide parent involvement project, and includes benchmarks for progress in three areas: improving student achievement, increasing parent involvement, and having a lasting impact. Available at <http://www.cleweb.org/parent.htm>.

- Paterson, L. L. (2002). *Supporting parents as leaders*.

From the Institute for Responsive Education, this book highlights stories of several inspiring parent leaders. Administrators and board members speak about the importance of parent involvement. Themes of the book include parent empowerment, the importance of parents in student achievement, and the interdependence of school and parent efforts. Available at <http://www.dac.neu.edu/ire/pdf/supporting.pdf>.

PITFALLS TO AVOID

- ➡ Every school has several very active parents. It becomes easy to call on them whenever a parent representative is needed. Special efforts need to be made to broaden the list of parents who represent the school, perhaps using more active parents to recruit others.
- ➡ Although family and community members do not expect to get paid a salary, they rarely stay involved if their efforts are not appreciated. A successful way to “pay” participants to take leadership roles is to provide them with new skills and knowledge through training.

HOW DOES IT LINK TO THE ACHIEVEMENT INITIATIVE?

This element is an extension of the “Leadership” priorities on professional growth (“Teaching”). Building administrators and teacher leaders will have important roles in developing the leadership capacity of family and community members.

This element is also an extension of the “Professional Development” priority. In addition to developing, empowering, and providing leadership opportunities for staff (“Capacity Building”), administrators should include family and community members in leadership development activities.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Some tools to evaluate family and community involvement include the following.

- *Community education toolkit*
To evaluate leadership and accountability in a community education setting, the Wisconsin Department of Education provides a list of objectives and measurement criteria at <http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/dlcl/bbfcsp/cetoolld.html>. To evaluate citizen involvement, see <http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/dlcl/bbfcsp/cetoolca.html>.

- *The power of parent partnership*

A parent involvement project scoring guide is available at <http://www.cleweb.org/parent.htm>.

For examples of programs that use a training-of-trainer model, please see the following:

- Reading Recovery (<http://www.readingrecovery.org/>).
- The Latino Family Literacy Project (http://www.latinoliteracy.com/program_description.htm).

- The Volunteer Services/ Family Partnership program of the Minneapolis Public Schools (<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/SER/ParentComm/minneap.html>).

Environment

ELEMENT

Enhance an atmosphere of inclusion and collaboration

A school continues to:

A school environment is created that is inviting and provides opportunities for cultural awareness and diversity training. This environment enhances an atmosphere of inclusion and collaboration.



WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

Family Friendly is a unique program that is improving the level of customer service in the Duval (FL) County Public Schools. In order for a school or administrative department to be designated Family Friendly, it must first participate in and complete specialized customer service training offered by the district's Community Involvement staff. In addition, applicants are required to submit extensive portfolios highlighting numerous examples of outstanding customer service which they've displayed. After completing training and earning the distinction of being officially designated Family Friendly, the school or administrative department receives a Certificate of Recognition and a Family Friendly flag or banner for display.

WHY DO IT?

Research shows that working with families in a friendly and constructive manner is not often taught in our nation's teacher education programs. Teachers and support staff need professional development in techniques for working collaboratively with families.

HOW CAN IT BE DONE?

- Make sure that staff members are familiar with culturally equitable practices and that culturally-acceptable terminology is used.
- Put welcoming messages on the school's marquee.
- Create signs that denote "parent parking" in several spots near the school doors.
- Make sure that welcome and directional signs are clear and well-marked—in more than one language, if necessary.
- Provide a family-friendly first contact with the school. Make sure that signs near the entrances make parents feel valued and welcome. Create an inviting atmosphere in the main office. Make sure that family and community members are warmly welcomed. Provide a place to sit if they must wait for a staff member. Also provide family informational material to read and perhaps a cup of coffee.
- When a family member appears at the classroom door during a lesson, catch that person's eye, smile and nod toward an empty chair in the room. As soon as possible, ascertain the purpose of the visit. If there is a simple question or request, it can be handled immediately. If not, make an appointment for a longer conference.
- Home visits are wonderful ways to establish home-school relationships. They are also a good way to quickly get to know new students. Make an appointment ahead of time and keep your visit short, but friendly.
- Include the student whenever possible during parent-teacher conferences. Students need to learn how to self-assess and be involved in their own improvement plans.

- If a conflict arises or a parent becomes angry and upset, suggest that the conversation continue in the presence of a counselor, administrator, or another team member to provide support and balanced information.
- Consider establishing a parent center at the school.

USEFUL TOOLS

The following tools will help ensure positive family and community involvement:

- *The ABC Book of Educational Terms: A Plain Language Guide for Parents.*

This booklet, available from RMC Research Corporation, 1-800-922-3636, defines Colorado educational terms for parents in an easy to understand format.

- *What's going on in my child's school?*

A guide for Spanish-speaking parents about good schools is available as a PDF at <http://www.seidl.org/pubs/catalog/items/fam91.html> and the English link is at <http://www.seidl.org/pubs/catalog/items/fam31.html>.

- *Evaluation of Current Actions to Enhance Cultural and Linguistic Competence*

For an internal assessment of current practices, see <http://www.omhrc.gov/clas/checklist4.pdf>.

- *Community Involvement, Input and Support*

A similar internal assessment for a community health care facility can be seen at <http://www.omhrc.gov/clas/checklist6.pdf>.

- *National Network for Child Care. Five ways to analyze classrooms for an anti-bias approach.*

To evaluate the level of multiculturalism in a classroom, check out: http://www.nccc.org/Diversity/sac26_anti-bias.analyz.html.

- In today's multicultural environment, it is important that what children read reflects the world around them. Tools for evaluating children's books for cultural appropriateness include:
 - Shiohita, J. (1997). *Beyond good intentions: Selecting multicultural literature*. A checklist available at <http://www.4children.org/news/9-97mlit.htm>.
 - The Council on Interracial Books for Children. (n.d.). *Ten quick ways to examine children's books for racism and sexism*. A checklist available at <http://www.birchlane.davis.ca.us/library/10quick.htm>.
 - *Stereotyping of Native Americans*. A list of negative stereotypes in literature to avoid is available at http://www.unr.edu/nnap/NT/i-8_9.htm.

Booklists on specific cultures include:

- Collins, T., & Hagerman, R. (1999). *Cultural Resources for Mexican American Education*, ED438149. Available at http://www.ericfacility.net/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed438149.html.
- *The Hmong: Books for K-12 classrooms*. Available at <http://www.uwsuper.edu/library/hmong/books.html>.

PITFALLS TO AVOID

- Small things, such as rude comments from a staff member, ignoring a parent in the main office, or neglecting a littered playground, can undermine the efforts of a family friendly school. Keep the family friendly focus in the forefront of discussions and meetings.
- Be aware that perceptions about the school are developed through casual conversations in the neighborhood and in the rest of the community. Encourage staff, parents, and members of the community to accentuate the positive.

HOW DOES IT LINK TO THE ACHIEVEMENT INITIATIVE?

This element links directly to the “Instruction and High Standards of Student Work” priority. Parents and community members can contribute to an inviting, multicultural, and diverse classroom environment (“Learning Context”), and provide alternative materials to support construction of content meaning (“Resources”).

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

The following resources offer more information for working with specific student populations:

- Vilanni, C. J. (1999). Community culture and school climate. *School Community Journal*, 9(1), 103-105.

This article describes the importance of creating and maintaining a positive school climate through inclusive involvement of the broader community. Community support of schools enhances student motivation, desire to learn, and willingness to succeed.

- Delpit, L. (1995). *Other people's children*. New York: The New Press.

Teachers may inadvertently employ styles of instruction and discipline in conflict with community norms. This can mean that teachers misunderstand students' aptitudes, intent, or abilities. Delpit maintains that knowing about one's students' cultures is a requirement for appropriate multicultural instruction.

For information related to specific student populations, consult the following references:

- Gonzalez, J. E., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2000). *Programs that prepare teachers to work effectively with students learning English*.

Available at http://www.ericfacility.net/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed447724.html. The topic of this ERIC Digest is generally problems with traditional teacher education programs, although it does highlight two exemplary programs. Three helpful rules are given for working with students who are learning English:

1. Start at the beginning. Don't assume the student is familiar with what is obvious to English speaking students, such as how to find specific information in a book.
2. Break down long-term (2- to 3-week) projects. Smaller segments need to be demonstrated with an example before the students themselves carry out the tasks.
3. Use models. Share examples of finished assignments as well as some not yet completed. This models the process that leads to the finished product.

- Espinosa, L. M. (1995). *Hispanic parent involvement in early childhood programs*. Urbana, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education. Available at http://www.ericfacility.net/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed382412.html.
- Feng, J. (1994). *Asian-American children: What teachers should know*. Urbana, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education. Available at http://www.ericfacility.net/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed369577.html.
- Trueba, E. T., & Bartolome, L. I. (1997). *The education of Latino students: Is school reform enough?* Available at http://www.ericfacility.net/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed410367.html.

ELEMENT

Bridge the culture of the community with the culture of the school

A school continues to:

A school environment is created that not only provides for the needs of all cultures and languages, but builds understanding of both community and school cultures and norms. This understanding leads to a bridge between the cultures of school and community.



WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

Palm Desert High School in La Quinta, California, developed a Chemical/Conflict Awareness Network Student Assistance Program. This high school and its surrounding community decided to work intensely to correct problems of conflict, inequity, and discrimination that were dividing the school, its student body, and its surrounding community. Collaboration among school/community members, leadership development, and the sharing of resources were major factors in developing this exemplary model of effective school environment.

The Washington State Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction began the Unity Project connecting parents, schools, and communities. They assembled four “ethnic think tanks” of African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic, and Native American parents and community leaders. These groups worked with educators teaching in lower income communities. Together they invented strategies to enhance family, community, and school interactions to create high performance learning programs.

WHY DO IT?

The United States is one of the most culturally, ethnically, racially, and linguistically diverse countries in the world. In an increasing number of classrooms, the student population is majority-minority. Because one educational approach may not be successful with all groups, researchers advise teachers to examine a range of strategies to enhance their work with students and family members from a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Educators should develop a common foundation of knowledge and practical strategies to address the needs of the children and families they serve, especially when the families' cultural and linguistic backgrounds are different from their own.

HOW CAN IT BE DONE?

Some hints for schools to include community cultures include:

- Schedule cultural events and activities that involve students and families.
- Create school displays of student art and other products that families can enjoy.
- Be sure written and oral communication, including forms and handbooks, is available in the language of the home.
- Have trained interpreters and translators available to serve as facilitators and communicators in working with school personnel and families.
- Designate school personnel from whom families can obtain information about school events, student achievement, and other concerns.
- Train school personnel to discuss school performance and school culture with families.
- Encourage parents to talk about their dreams for their child.

- Understand the difference between the culture of the family and the economic status of the family. It is important to understand how poverty affects families.
- Learn about each family's culture and values.
- Acknowledge the negative impact of teachers' low expectations on underserved students.
- Create opportunities for educators and students to get to know each other better on a personal basis.
- Celebrate diversity and affirm self-worth.
- Set high expectations and provide equal educational opportunities for all students.

Some hints for schools to inform community members about school culture include:

- Take time to visit the family and meet with them in their own home.
- Try to view the situation from the family's perspective. They may not understand, or they may have a different viewpoint than you do.
- Find out what parents need in order to feel more confident about participating in school events.
- Arrange community groups where people can support each other, learn about school, and develop advocacy skills.
- Give parents opportunities to contribute their expertise to the school in ways that are not directly related to their own child. Encourage parents to be involved with school and community projects and boards.

Some hints to include fathers in the school culture include:

- Make an effort to plan activities that will appeal to some of fathers' greater loves; food, sports, and carpentry. Helping with the physical improvement of schools may be one area where fathers feel particularly comfortable.
- Invite dads and kids to attend a "Pizza and Basketball Night". After playing basketball and eating pizza, suggest books that they can read together at home.
- Hold a "Dad's Doughnut Day". Invite dads and other significant men in a child's life to attend a coffee and doughnut breakfast followed by visitations in the child's classroom. Take photos of each child with his or her father. Encourage teachers to include the fathers in interactive classroom activities.
- To improve fathers' relationships with their children (a factor tied to prevention of teenage substance abuse), schedule a "Father's Night Out". That evening have fathers answer a questionnaire called "How Well Do You Know Your Child"? Ask questions such as:
 - Who is your child's favorite teacher?
 - Name your child's best friend.
 - What is your child's proudest accomplishment?
 - What does your child think you do for a living?

After the evening is over, ask the fathers to go home and interview their child to determine the correct answers to the questions. This often leads to meaningful discussions between fathers and children.

- Host a "Bring Your Dad to School Day".
- Ask fathers to share their jobs, favorite hobbies, or special talents with students.
- Invite fathers to chaperone class field trips or join their child for lunch.
- Provide fathers with literature regarding the impact of father involvement on children.

USEFUL TOOLS

The following tools are helpful in working with culturally and linguistically diverse families:

- Bruns, D. A., & Corso, R. M. (2001). *Working with culturally and linguistically diverse families*.

This ERIC Digest lists areas of critical importance that affect the formation of effective helping relationships between families and early childhood professionals. Based on consideration of these areas of possible conflict, strategies are described to reduce the impact of cultural and linguistic differences and to enhance interactions with families from diverse backgrounds. Available at http://www.ericfacility.net/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed455972.html.

- Burnette, J. (1999). *Critical behaviors and strategies for teaching culturally diverse students*.

Many school factors affect the success of culturally diverse students, including the school's atmosphere and overall attitudes, community involvement, and culturally responsive curriculum. Of all these factors, the personal and academic relationships between teachers and their students may be the most significant. Certain behaviors and instructional strategies help teachers build a stronger teaching/learning relationship with culturally diverse students. Many of these behaviors and strategies are standard practices of good teaching, while others are specific to working with students from diverse cultures. This ERIC Digest lists and gives examples of many in each category. Available at http://www.ericfacility.net/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed435147.html.

PITFALLS TO AVOID

- Be careful when translating communications into other languages. We often assume that a precise translation will be adequate for parent and community audiences. Be sure to evaluate and revise translations for cultural appropriateness and accuracy.
- Don't forget fathers when planning family activities. They are often overlooked and can be a valuable asset.

HOW DOES IT LINK TO THE ACHIEVEMENT INITIATIVE?

This element links directly to the "Instruction and High Standards of Student Work" priority. Teachers who understand community cultures and norms are better prepared to understand their students as learners ("Content Knowledge"), and thus are able to make more appropriate instructional decisions.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

The following resources will help educators to work with culturally diverse families.

- Burnette, J. (1999). *Critical behaviors and strategies for teaching culturally diverse students*. Reston, VA: ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education. Available for a fee through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS), 1-800-443-3742, for \$7.60 paper or \$6.30 electronic. Ask for ED435147.
- Abdal-Haqq, I. (1994). *Culturally Responsive Curriculum*. Available at http://www.ericfacility.net/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed370936.html.

- Sanchez, W., et al. (1995). *Working with Diverse Learners and School Staff in a Multicultural Society*. Available at http://www.ericfacility.net/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed390018.html.

There are many challenges in working with an increasingly multicultural school population. Among issues addressed in this ERIC Digest, an article with many useful references, are:

- Training culturally sensitive professionals;
 - Culturally sensitive instructional and assessment practices;
 - Training students to be culturally sensitive; and
 - Involving parents and community as authentic participants.
- *Teaching Tolerance* is a semiannual periodical distributed free online to teachers and other educators. The magazine's goal is to provide a vehicle for sharing ideas and resources for teaching tolerance and understanding among various groups. Available at <http://www.tolerance.org/teach>.

Student Achievement

ELEMENT

A school's continuing partnership with families and community results in increased student achievement through:

Ongoing evaluation and adjustment of the family and community involvement strategies to maximize student achievement

A school's continuing partnership with families and the community results in increased student achievement through frequent and meaningful communication and collaboration between schools and families. This collaboration may include homework assignments that include family members, subject area "nights" where families can learn how to assist students in their studies and frequent phone calls.



WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

Ferguson Elementary School in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, holds a "Parents Make a Difference" Conference. This two-day event includes parents observing children reading and participating in hands-on math activities. School staff members and children travel door to door on a Sunday to invite the community. The school also holds teacher-directed community workshops six Saturdays a year to focus on needs of students in different grade levels. They also provide training and stipends to parents to serve as classroom aides.

WHY DO IT?

Research has shown that when educators and parents communicate about a child's progress, they establish a stronger learning environment both at home and at school. Research also shows that the level of parent involvement in both elementary and secondary schools is relatively high. However, the frequency of participation depends on the child's grade level, parental income, and educational background.

HOW CAN IT BE DONE?

Many textbook series offer information on communicating with parents, including blackline masters of letters to be sent home. When using these commercial products, make sure that they are aligned with your curriculum, and that they communicate with parents in a respectful manner.

There are many available programs for "Family Nights" around different subject areas. For more information on two of these programs, access Family Science at <http://www.familyscience.org/>, and Family Math at <http://www.lhs.berkeley.edu/equals/FMnetwork.htm>.

When sending home newsletters, always send them on the same color paper and on the same day of the month. Parents come to anticipate them and know what to look for when sifting through mail. In addition, use as many photos and other graphics as possible for better readability. Use children's names frequently. Translate newsletters if appropriate.

Hold parent meetings before choral and instrumental concerts. Parents ordinarily bring their children early to rehearse. Also, hold parent meetings at more than one time of the day. Typically, parents are

reluctant to leave home after dinner. Good times for meetings are often when parents are either on their way to work or on their way home.

Make sure that all teachers and other staff members develop expertise in the three personal competencies most often cited by researchers as important for effective multicultural relationships:

- Listening carefully;
- Showing respect; and
- Displaying empathy.

USEFUL TOOL

The following resource is designed to encourage family and community involvement in both elementary and secondary schools.

- Molloy, P., et al. (1995). *Building home, school, community partnerships: The planning phase*.

This book includes a variety of tools to carry the partnership project from initiation, through building relationships, developing a shared vision, and moving toward collaborative action. It is available as a PDF document at <http://www.sedl.org/pubs/fam01/planning.pdf>.

PITFALLS TO AVOID

- ➡ Educators must be sure that they contact parents with positive news as well as with problems.
- ➡ When assigning homework assignments that involve families, be sure students are given a choice of projects. Some homes are non-traditional in family structure, culture, and/or religion. Ask families to call if they need more alternatives.

HOW DOES IT LINK TO THE ACHIEVEMENT INITIATIVE?

This element links directly to the “Instruction and High Standards of Student Work” priority. Teachers who understand both the content they teach and the appropriate teaching strategies for their students (“Content Knowledge”) can communicate learning expectations readily to parents.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

The following resources will be helpful for those who wish to extend their learning.

- Chang, J. *Scaffolding for School-Home Collaboration: Enhancing Reading and Language Development*. Available from the Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence (CREDE) Web site at <http://www.cal.org/crede/pubs/ResBrief9.htm>.
This research brief describes “Family Literacy Nights” at a Title 1 middle school in San Jose. The content area and special education teachers integrated effective teaching strategies with research on literacy development to create a graphic representation of how parents could assist with their children’s education. Families worked with the teachers to reinforce student learning by transferring it from school to home.
- *Parental Involvement in Schools*. Available from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) Web site at <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2001/section6/indicator54.asp>.

This research summary shows that parental involvement in schools decreases with the child’s grade level, and increases with household income and educational attainment. This information allows schools to target their recruitment efforts for increasing parent involvement. Parent involvement was

coded into one of four categories: attendance at a general meeting, attendance at a scheduled meeting with a teacher, attendance at a school event, or acting as a volunteer or committee member.

- Mapp, K. L. (2003). Having their say: Parents describe why and how they are engaged in their children's learning. *The School Community Journal*, 13(1), 35-64. Available at <http://www.dac.neu.edu/ire/pdf/mappArticle.pdf>.

This readable research article describes five general findings from interviews of parents whose children are in public school.

1. Parents want their children to succeed, and want to help them.
2. Parents understand that their involvement helps their children's achievement.
3. Parents and extended family members are involved at home and at school, although not necessarily in traditional roles.
4. A parent's personal experience with schooling influences parental involvement.
5. School relationship factors (welcoming, honoring, connecting) influence parent participation.

ELEMENT**A school's continuing partnership with families and community results in increased student achievement through:****Frequent and meaningful communication and collaboration between schools and families**

A school effectively communicates expectations for student achievement in all content areas and progress in these areas as well as opportunities available to families to help increase their children's achievement. They also articulate the importance of family and community involvement, citing research to underscore its importance in raising student achievement. In addition, they demonstrate, using their own data, that increased family and community involvement has made an impact on student achievement.

**WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?**

Horace Mann Elementary School in St. Paul, Minnesota, sends home brief weekly reports every Friday. The reports note the completion of all assignments, missing work, and teacher requests to speak with the parent about some particular issue. The teacher also makes individualized comments about each student's work during the week. Parents are asked to review the information and return it on Monday.

WHY DO IT?

Research tells us that increased family and community involvement results in higher test scores and grades regardless of ethnicity, gender, or socio-economic status. Research also indicates that benefits of increased family and community involvement include more completion of homework, more positive attitudes and behavior, higher graduation rates, and greater enrollment in higher education. Finally, research is clear that the greater the amount of family and community involvement, the greater the impact on student achievement.

HOW CAN IT BE DONE?

- Advertise the research-based importance of parent involvement in every home-school communication. This includes cover letters for report cards and progress reports, newsletters, signs inside and outside the school building, and recorded messages.
- Examine family-friendly practices for parent teacher conferences. Whenever possible, involve the child in the conference. This builds the child's ability to self-assess and helps to develop a sense of responsibility. Investigate student-led conferences as a strategy.
- Develop effective procedures for communicating with families about academic progress. Besides established district policies and procedures, each school should develop a supplemental system of communication. Possibilities include sending a folder of work home each week, sending e-mail messages, making phone calls, making home visits, and scheduling conferences.

USEFUL TOOLS

The following resources are designed to encourage family and community involvement in both elementary and secondary schools.

- *Help at last: Monthly activities for family involvement in learning*
- *Help at last: Monthly activities for parent involvement in secondary schools*

Each booklet contains a series of 10 monthly learning tips for parents on a variety of important topics. These tips can be duplicated for parents and can be sent home by teachers or attached to newsletters. There is an accompanying page called “Tips for Teachers” with each monthly topic. Both volumes can be ordered for \$5.00 each by calling RMC Research Corporation at 1-800-922-3636.

- *Ten Questions About Children’s Success in School.* Available at <http://www.par-inst.com/educator/resources/10questions/10qstns.php>.

This is a quiz (with answers provided!) that could be used to convey research information to parents or teachers in an enjoyable format.

PITFALLS TO AVOID

- ➡ When summarizing research, avoid using acronyms or jargon. Keep the format simple and translate the research into easy-to-understand language.
- ➡ Try to phrase the research in positive terms. Avoid sounding accusatory.

HOW DOES IT LINK TO THE ACHIEVEMENT INITIATIVE?

This element links directly to the “Instruction and High Standards of Student Work” priority. The importance of effective family involvement to achieve a high level of student investment, engagement, and satisfaction in meaningful classroom tasks (“Student Work”) cannot be overstated. It also links to the “Professional Development” priority. District and school data are to be used to identify needs for future professional development.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

The following resources give more detail and further information. The first is written for parents, the second for professional educators.

- *Helping your child succeed: What parents and families can do at home to help their children meet high standards.* Available free from the American Federation of Teachers (Educational Issues, 555 New Jersey Avenue NW, Washington DC 20001, 1-202-879-4495).

This document is addressed to parents. The first in the Helping Your Child Succeed pamphlet series, it offers tips for parents to use at home to help children achieve success at school.

- de Kanter, A., Ginsburg, A., Pederson, J., & Ferguson, S. (n.d.). Research and evaluation on family-school-community partnerships. Available at <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/PFIE/family/sld001.html>

This PowerPoint slide show presents research on family involvement and student achievement.

Rubrics and Tracking Sheets

AURORA FAMILY AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT RUBRICS

Assessment/Evaluation & Planning

ELEMENT	A school continues to implement its strategies by:		
	Introductory phase, just beginning	In progress, working toward proficiency	Accomplished, meets highest expectations
Planning from current data on family and community needs, skills, and interests	The school conducts a survey of potential family interests and talents and a survey of the needs of staff members.	The school conducts multiple assessments of parent and community skills and interests. These assessments are regularly used in planning school activities, matching resources with staff needs.	The school develops a resource bank of family and community members and their interests and skills, and provides ways for them to be involved in the school community even if they cannot regularly volunteer at the school.
Comment:			

ELEMENT	A school continues to implement its strategies by:		
	Introductory phase, just beginning	In progress, working toward proficiency	Accomplished, meets highest expectations
Maintaining effective resources	The school allocates some resources to family and community involvement programs. Involvement tasks are equitably distributed among staff members.	The school employs family involvement personnel, if at all feasible economically. Involvement tasks are collaboratively and equitably planned and completed.	The school allocates and reallocates funds to fully support the parent and community involvement program including designating trained staff. It actively identifies and utilizes family and community members based on the assessment of skills and interests.
Comment:			

A school continues to implement its strategies by:			
ELEMENT	Introductory phase, just beginning	In progress, working toward proficiency	Accomplished, meets highest expectations
Including collaboration with the wider community	The school counselors and nurse maintain a community resource directory for parents and students with information on community agencies, programs, and services.	The school investigates and identifies possible resource providers and provides a community resource directory to all families. The school also connects the families with services by inviting specific resource providers to the school.	The school develops programs for families that bring community resources into the school (e.g., school-linked health and social services).
	Comment:		

A school continues to implement its strategies by:			
ELEMENT	Introductory phase, just beginning	In progress, working toward proficiency	Accomplished, meets highest expectations
Annually renewing its strategies	The school includes parent and community involvement strategies in its School Improvement Plan and actively implements these strategies.	The school implements parent and community involvement strategies and reviews their effectiveness frequently, revising them as necessary.	The school implements parent and community involvement strategies, reviewing and revising them as necessary, and reallocates funds to make these strategies economically feasible.
	Comment:		

AURORA FAMILY AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT RUBRICS

Leadership/Partnership Opportunities

ELEMENT	A school's family and community involvement is visible and reflected in:		
	Introductory phase, just beginning	In progress, working toward proficiency	Accomplished, meets highest expectations
Families assuming leadership roles in the design, development, and implementation of future goals and programs	The school identifies family and community members for participation in teams that address campus improvement plans and strategies.	The school identifies family and community members for participation and incorporates their perspectives in campus improvement plans and strategies.	The school identifies family and community members for participation in campus improvement teams, incorporates the perspectives of these team members in designing, implementing, and assessing campus improvement plans. Family and community members are encouraged to take leadership roles in these activities.
Comment:			

ELEMENT	A school's family and community involvement is visible and reflected in:		
	Introductory phase, just beginning	In progress, working toward proficiency	Accomplished, meets highest expectations
Community partnerships which strengthen and support student achievement	The school extends learning in school by connecting with community members and resources outside of school for the purpose of supporting achievement.	The school uses community members and resources to extend learning in school by incorporating these resources into before and after school programs.	The school extends learning inside and outside of school by collaboratively developing, with the community, learning programs that exist for the purpose of strengthening families and supporting achievement.
Comment:			

ELEMENT	A school's family and community involvement is visible and reflected in:		
	Introductory phase, just beginning	In progress, working toward proficiency	Accomplished, meets highest expectations
Trained family and community leaders training other family and community leaders	The school provides families with opportunities to make decisions that promote school and curricular reform at the campus level and provides information to help families to effectively participate in decision making activities.	The school provides families with opportunities to train other family members in decision making skills that build the parent and community capacity at the school level.	The school provides both family and community leaders with opportunities to train other family and community members in decision making skills that build capacity in the school and the greater community.
	Comment:		

AURORA FAMILY AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT RUBRICS

Environment

ELEMENT	A school continues to:		
	Introductory phase, just beginning	In progress, working toward proficiency	Accomplished, meets highest expectations
Enhance an atmosphere of inclusion and collaboration	Families are welcome in the school (i.e., office staff greets family members in a courteous way, multi-lingual directions and signs are clearly posted so that visitors can find their way around the school).	The school has an open door policy so that family members feel welcome at anytime. Opportunities for cultural awareness and diversity training are available to staff and parents.	The school has a designated space or another appropriate setting for volunteer work, meetings, and resources for families. Diversity is celebrated daily in multiple ways.
Comment:			

ELEMENT	A school continues to:		
	Introductory phase, just beginning	In progress, working toward proficiency	Accomplished, meets highest expectations
Bridge the culture of the community with the culture of the school	The school provides for the needs of all cultures and languages by employing linguistic interpreters and providing written translations of materials.	The school provides for the needs of all cultures and languages by personal contact and/or home visitations by school staff to ensure that families are provided information about school norms in their native languages.	School to community and parent to parent outreach ensures that an understanding of both school and community cultures and norms is reached.
Comment:			

AURORA FAMILY AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT RUBRICS

Student Achievement

ELEMENT	A school's continuing partnership with families and community results in increased student achievement through:		
	Introductory phase, just beginning	In progress, working toward proficiency	Accomplished, meets highest expectations
Ongoing evaluation and adjustment of the family and community involvement strategies to maximize student achievement	The school provides information on ways that families can monitor homework and occasionally assigns homework that include family members.	The school provides daily or weekly activities that families can do at home to support student learning and occasionally holds subject area meetings where family members can learn how to assist students.	The school assigns homework that requires students to discuss and interact with their family members about what they are learning in class. The school also actively recruits and provides support (i.e., transportation, childcare, food, language interpreters, etc.) for participation in joint workshops on student learning.
Comment:			

ELEMENT	A school's continuing partnership with families and community results in increased student achievement through:		
	Introductory phase, just beginning	In progress, working toward proficiency	Accomplished, meets highest expectations
Frequent and meaningful communication and collaboration between schools and families	The school staff follows required procedures for communicating to family members about student achievement and opportunities to improve. The staff informs families that their involvement is important.	The school staff provides for two-way communication including positive feedback about student achievement and opportunities to improve. Staff informs families that their involvement is important using relevant research.	The school staff frequently provides information about student progress that includes positive personal contacts about student achievement. Research-based statements about the importance of family involvement appear in multiple places and, when appropriate, school-based data are published to show how this involvement has led to increased student achievement.
Comment:			

A TRACKING SHEET OF FAMILY AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Getting from Implementation to Sustained Improvement

Directions: When scoring each rubric at the beginning of the school year, place that date in the corresponding blank on this chart. Do the same at the end of the school year. Attach supporting documents behind these tracking sheets or keep a portfolio of supporting documents for each improvement step. Add dates from left to right as you become more accomplished. **Key: 1** = Introductory phase, just beginning, **2** = In progress, working toward completion, **3** = Accomplished, meets highest expectations.

Assessment/ Evaluation and Planning	Implementation	1	2	3	Refinement	1	2	3	Sustained Improvement	1	2	3
	<i>A school: assesses needs, skills, and interests of families and communities</i>	Date			<i>A school continues to implement its family and community strategies by: reviewing assessment tools to determine current relevancy</i>	Date			<i>A school continues to implement its strategies by: planning from current data on family and community needs, skills, and interests</i>	Date		
	identifies goals				analyzing and interpreting results of the assessments				maintaining effective resources			
	identifies school resources including specific staff members as parent contact				modifying the school improvement strategies based on current data				including collaboration with the wider community			
	investigates community resources				reconsidering resources to meet the revised strategies				annually renewing its strategies			
	develops and implements strategies to address family and community needs in the School Improvement Plan											

Key: 1 = Introductory phase, just beginning, **2** = In progress, working toward completion, **3** = Accomplished, meets highest expectations.

Sustained

Leadership/ Partnership Opportunities	Implementation	1	2	3	Refinement	1	2	3	Improvement	1	2	3
		Date				Date				Date		
	<i>A school provides a wide range of opportunities for families and community to: understand the process of designing, developing, and implementing school improvement strategies</i>				<i>A school provides a wide range of opportunities for family and community to: jointly develop the school improvement strategies, review progress, and guide the annual renewal of those strategies</i>				<i>A school's family and community involvement is visible and reflected in: families assuming leadership roles in the design, development, and implementation of future goals and programs</i>			
	support student achievement				share their knowledge and skills to support the school				community partnerships which strengthen families and support student achievement			
	develop as leaders								trained family and community leaders training other potential family and community leaders			
	link skills and interests to a wide range of opportunities											

Key: 1 = Introductory phase, just beginning, **2 =** In progress, working toward completion, **3 =** Accomplished, meets highest expectations.

Environment	Implementation	1	2	3	Refinement	1	2	3	Sustained Improvement	1	2	3
		Date				Date				Date		
	<i>A school environment is created that is inviting to all families and community</i>				<i>A school provides opportunities for cultural awareness and diversity training</i>				<i>A school continues to: enhance an atmosphere of inclusion and collaboration</i>			
	provides for the needs of all cultures and languages				for building understanding of both community and school cultures and norms				bridge the culture of the community with the culture of the school			

Key: 1 = Introductory phase, just beginning, 2 = In progress, working toward completion, 3 = Accomplished, meets highest expectations.

Student Achievement	Implementation	1	2	3	Refinement	1	2	3	Sustained Improvement	1	2	3
	<i>A school effectively communicates to all families:</i> the expectations for student achievement in reading, writing, math, oral language, and content areas at each grade level	Date			<i>A school regularly and effectively communicates to all families:</i> the impact of family and community involvement on student achievement	Date			<i>A school's continuing partnership with families and community results in increased student achievement through:</i> ongoing evaluation and adjustment of the family and community involvement strategies to maximize student achievement	Date		
	their children's progress in these areas								frequent and meaningful communication and collaboration between schools and families			
	the opportunities available to help increase their children's achievement											