

Meeting NCLB Requirements For Family Involvement

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THE NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT (NCLB), with its sweeping requirements for annual state achievement tests in reading and math for students in grades 3-8, also requires serious attention to parental involvement. All schools that receive Title I funds must develop policies on partnerships and conduct programs that involve parents in ways that support student success in school.

In addition, all schools must

- Provide professional development to educators to organize effective partnership programs
- Help parents understand state standards and assessments
- Provide materials to help parents assist their children's achievement at home
- Communicate using formats and languages that parents will understand.

More than 200 middle level schools across the country have begun to address these NCLB requirements as members of the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) at Johns Hopkins University. The partnership helps members understand and implement a comprehensive model of school, family, and community partnerships.

Schools in NNPS begin with an Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), a committee of the school improvement team. The ATP uses six types of involvement—parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community—to ensure that parents have many different ways to become involved at home, at school, and in the community (see page 16).

The ATP writes an annual One-Year Action Plan for partnerships linked to specific school improvement goals. For example, if a school is working to improve students' reading and writing test scores, some activities in its One-Year Action Plan will involve families and the community with students on literacy skills and attitudes. If a school is working to increase math skills, the plan will include some family and community involvement activities about math.

All schools in NNPS create a welcoming school environment—a partnership place—where students, families, and educators understand and respect each other as partners for student success. The ATP coordinates and integrates the school's family and community involvement practices, evaluates progress, and guides the school and its partners to improve outreach to all families and the quality of partnership practices over time.



UNDERSTANDING THE SCHOOL-PARENT COMPACT

One confusing aspect of NCLB's requirement for a comprehensive partnership program rests in the term *school-parent compact*. Some schools interpret the *school-parent compact* as a pledge for parents to promise to be good partners in their children's education. But a pledge is not a compact. A pledge—which should be signed by teachers, parents, and students—is a symbolic communication that calls attention to the importance of partnerships. It may be included as one activity in a compact, but is not the compact itself.

NCLB is very clear that a school-parent compact is a detailed plan that outlines how educators and parents will work together to support student achievement and “the means by which the school and parents will build and develop a partnership to help children achieve the state's high standards.” NCLB also gives examples of activities for the six types of involvement to illustrate the content of a well-planned comprehensive program.

LEADING BY EXAMPLE: MIDDLE SCHOOLS IN NNPS

For the middle schools in NNPS, an annual One-Year Action Plan for partnerships is the school-parent compact. With input from all families to the ATP, the annual written plan outlines a schedule of activities that involve families and community partners in ways that help students reach school goals for improving reading and writing skills, math skills and scores, attendance, and behavior. They also help create a welcoming environment for all educators, students, families, and community partners in education.

Following are a few examples of how middle schools in NNPS are beginning to address NCLB requirements for a comprehensive program of family involvement linked to school goals for student achievement and success.

Harborside Middle School in Milford, Connecticut, designed and implemented strategies to get information from workshops on state standards, school tests and assessments, and school programs to parents who could not attend.

The school produced videotapes and audiotapes of workshops, created a Web site, printed summaries and reading lists for parents, and organized opportunities for parents to ask questions and discuss workshop topics with school staff in face to face meetings, by phone, or via e-mail.

Collinwood Computech Middle/High School in Cleveland, Ohio, is working to raise students' test scores. The school's Action Team for Partnerships, with support from business partners, hosted a breakfast for parents, students, teachers, and community members about state tests and student work. The morning included proficiency games and information about practice tests and the services and assistance available to help students improve their skills.

The school reported that more students reached proficiency levels after the activity than in the prior year. The Proficiency Breakfast also raised parents' awareness of the state tests and how to help at home by supporting students' schoolwork and homework.



Franklin D. Roosevelt Middle School in Cleveland, Ohio, conducted a Spring Family Affair with workshops on family literacy, student goal setting, student and family health, and summer learning opportunities for students.

Thurmont Middle School in Thurmont, Maryland, conducted math workshops for sixth grade students and parents to help students prepare for Maryland's Functional Math Test. At monthly meetings, parents and students worked with teachers in practice sessions, with extra help given to students as needed. More than 80 percent of the sixth graders passed the required math test, exceeding the school's expectations. By involving parents and students, teachers brought the importance of math to everyone's attention.

Madison Junior High, in Naperville, Illinois, fosters a welcoming environment for all families by implementing activities for all six types of involvement in the NNPS framework. This strategy includes evening discussions to help parents share effective parenting strategies; a Thursday Things newsletter to send information home once a week; a database of volunteers; honor roll breakfasts; family literacy nights; connections with business partners; Dad's Day; and more. All activities are linked to goals for students in the school improvement plan.

Byrd Middle School in Sun Valley, California, found that students' math scores were not improving as fast as reading scores. The school conducted math sessions for parents that focused on the math skills taught at each grade level, teachers' approach to new concepts and skills in algebra and problem solving, parents' questions about math, and samples of children's math skills and problems. The sessions helped many parents understand the demands that are made on students in math and how they can support students' math work at home.

Lowndes Middle School in Valdosta, Georgia, conducted a Fitness Fair with students and families to link good health and fitness (aerobics, salsa dancing, tennis, football, jump rope, climbing wall) with good work in school. The ATP believes that students' health and self-esteem influence achievement. Moreover, family involvement in such activities helped create a sense of community at the school.

De Anza Junior High in Calexico, California, serves a high percentage of migrant families and English language learners who want their children to succeed in school. If parents of sixth graders attended information sessions on such topics as student development, drug abuse prevention, gang affiliation, and preparation for middle school, their students could participate in a field trip at the end of the year.

Although parents at first objected to attending the workshops, they agreed that the meetings helped them help their children make a more successful transition to middle school. The school reported higher test scores and academic success, and less crime, violence, and graffiti.

Many more examples of middle school activities that contribute to comprehensive partnership programs can be found in the collections of Promising Partnership Practices on the NNPS Web site, www.partnershipschools.org in the section "In the Spotlight."



INCREASING COMMUNICATIONS WITH PARENTS

NCLB also requires schools to communicate with parents about their child’s achievement test scores, the school’s status in making Adequate Yearly Progress, disaggregated scores for major groups of students in the school, teachers’ professional qualifications, options for parents to change schools and to select supplementary education services for eligible students, and other information about education programs.

Schools that are developing comprehensive partnership programs are working to ensure that all communications with families are clear, timely, accessible, and in languages that families can understand in print, on the Internet, in e-mail, and in other formats.

REACHING GOALS FOR INVOLVEMENT

Some have criticized NCLB for seemingly unreasonable demands for high achievement for all students. That challenge must be met, however, to close achievement gaps that have prevented many students from reaching their full potential.

It is encouraging to note that NCLB’s requirements for family involvement are attainable by every middle school. Not only is help available to guide the development of comprehensive partnership programs, but there is a growing network of middle schools in diverse communities ready to share ideas and solutions to challenges to reach all families.

Indeed, NCLB reinforces what middle school educators have noted in *Turning Points 2000* and in *This We Believe*: family and community involvement must be one component of a successful school for successful students.

A RESEARCH-BASED FRAMEWORK OF SIX TYPES OF INVOLVEMENT

All schools can use the research-generated framework of six types of involvement to develop a comprehensive program of school, family, and community partnerships.

Type 1—Parenting: Assist families with parenting skills, family support, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions to support learning at each age and grade level. Assist schools in understanding families’ backgrounds, cultures, and goals for children.

Type 2—Communicating: Communicate with families about school programs and student progress in varied, clear, and productive ways. Create two-way communication channels from school to home and from home to school so that families can easily communicate with teachers, administrators, counselors, and other families.

Type 3—Volunteering: Improve recruitment, training, activities, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and as audiences at the school or in other locations. Enable educators to work with regular and occasional volunteers who assist and support students and the school.

continued



Type 4—Learning at Home: Involve families with their children in academic learning activities at home, including homework, goal setting, and other curriculum-related activities and decisions. Encourage teachers to design homework that enables students to share and discuss interesting work and ideas with family members.

Type 5—Decision Making: Include families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy activities through school councils or improvement teams, committees, PTA/PTO, and other parent organizations. Assist family and teacher representatives to obtain information from and give information to those they represent.

Type 6—Collaborating with Community: Coordinate resources and services for families, students, and the school with community businesses, agencies, cultural and civic organizations, colleges or universities, and other community groups. Enable students, staff, and families to contribute their service to the community.

Schools may choose from hundreds of practices to represent the six types of involvement. Each type of involvement has explicit challenges that must be met to turn an ordinary program into an excellent one. Family and community activities can be designed and implemented for each type of involvement to help students reach specific school goals.

From: Epstein, J. L. et al. (2002). School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action, second edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press. The handbook includes guidelines and tools for developing comprehensive programs of family and community involvement.

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