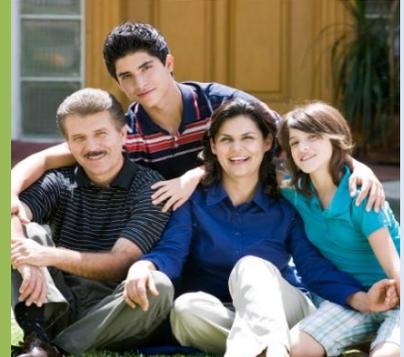


The Office of the Education Ombudsman

Special Report and Recommendations

The Missing Voices

What Families Say About Family Involvement
in Education



2010



“Parents open the door for partnership by getting their children to school. Schools need to keep that door open wide, because when we work together, we improve our children’s chances for success.”

OEO Parent Advisory Council



**The Office of the Education Ombudsman
Parent Advisory Council**

Novella Fraser – Federal Way School District

Maria Garcia – Edmonds School District

Annette King – Highline School District

Korbett Mosesly – Tacoma School District

Iris Okimoto-Nielsen – Seattle School District

Jill Pettersen – Burlington/Edison School District

Sharon Rodgers – Seattle School District

Efrem Seyoum – Seattle School District

Farah Syed – Northshore School District

Steven Van – Kent School District

Jenny Cochrane – Bellevue School District

Michelle Williams-Clark – Bellevue School District

Sandra Rollins – Franklin Pierce School District

“We are all in the same village, caring for the same children. Why shouldn’t we be working together?”

OEO Parent Advisory Council



I. Introduction

Given current State and Federal priorities to improve public education and close the achievement gap, here in Washington State we know that a key to our success lies in building strong partnerships between parents¹ and educators to support student learning. We know that family contributions to a child’s education are an essential resource for schools, and in times when resources are scarce, it is more important than ever to leverage the collective knowledge, social capital, and general support for children’s education that families bring to the picture.

OEO Timeline and Mission

Since its inception in 2007, The Office of the Education Ombudsman (OEO), an agency within the Governor’s Office, has worked with hundreds of Washington parents of diverse backgrounds, collecting anecdotal and qualitative data about their participation in education and experiences with schools. House Bill 3127 charged the OEO with identifying the obstacles to greater parent involvement in public schools, recommending strategies for stronger school-family partnerships, and resolving conflict between parents and educators that affects student learning. To date, OEO has intervened in over 1,500 cases of conflict between families and schools in 210 school districts, and taught nearly 5,000 parents and educators in Washington to work together more effectively.

Parent Advisory Council

Wanting to hear more directly from families about specific issues, in the fall of 2008 OEO convened a diverse group of parents from the Puget Sound area to serve on its Parent Advisory Council (PAC). PAC members work as advocates to improve the public education system and share their collective voice about their unique perspective, obstacles they encounter, and recommendations for how to better work with schools, other families, communities, and elected officials.

Special Report

In February 2009, PAC members expressed their concern that Washington parents needed a stronger voice in the discussion at the State level about school-family partnerships. Soon after, the PAC began working with OEO staff to compile this special report. This report is the result of an interactive process of data collection, research review, and recording of anecdotal information gathered from families and community members.

This report will present the perspectives of both parents and educators about school-family partnerships, and identify the obstacles to greater involvement. It will highlight the PAC’s recommendations to various stakeholders, as well as propose a paradigm shift and strategies for creating sustainable models and infrastructure. Finally it will cite relevant resources and research, and provide a sample family involvement policy for school districts, developed by the Washington State School Directors Association (WSSDA) and the Office of the Education Ombudsman (OEO).

¹ The terms “parents” and “families” are interchangeable in this report. They are meant to include: birth parents, family members, legal guardians, foster parents, and other caring adults in the life of a student.



Parents say that the way they are treated by school staff, how they interact with them, and whether they respond to their concerns is what deeply matters to them.

II. What Families & Educators Say: Perspectives and Obstacles

OEO has heard from Washington parents from all walks of life that they have a desire to be part of the education process and believe that together with educators they share the responsibility for their children's learning. However, parents often encounter obstacles to participation, and not everyone knows exactly how to get involved.

Family Perspectives

The world is changing rapidly and parents are concerned about the quality of the education their children receive. Most Washington schools utilize various strategies for involving families and many are decidedly successful in their efforts. However many parents report significant concerns with the public school system; they perceive it to be insulated, hierarchical, and outdated – “a place where professional educators work and where parents do not belong,” and many parents admit to feeling like “outsiders” in schools (PAC).

While successful schools are intentional and organized about engaging parents, others struggle or do not seem to make it a priority. Parents report that inconsistencies are present even among school buildings within the same school district; some work well, but some feel unwelcoming, and school officials appear distant and unwilling to establish relationships. We have found that across the State, parents are yearning to be included in the decisions made in schools and school districts. And while some schools have established structures for parent participation in governance, the practice is not wide-spread in Washington schools.

One PAC mother can almost envision the ideal of school-family involvement, but remains unconvinced: “In my dream of dreams, I see that every parent in this state knows how to partner with the school, and every school knows how to partner with parents. The school says: you are welcome here, come talk to us, have lunch with your kid, you are welcome at any time. Come learn with us! I don't know if that will ever happen.”

What Parents Want to Schools to Do

- **Involve us:**
Reach out to us, welcome us, and make us feel part of the school.
- **Let us help:**
Tell us where and how we can help.
- **Listen to us:**
Respond to our concerns in a timely and friendly manner.
- **Keep us informed:**
We want to know school policies, procedures, data, etc. Teach us what we need to know to support education.
- **Partner with us:**
Consider us members of the team that supports the success of all students.

Most importantly, parents say that the way they are treated by school staff, how they interact with them, and whether they respond to their concerns is what deeply matters to them and what ultimately determines their trust in the school. A member of the OEO Parent Advisory Council explains: “If a parent shows up at a school because he or she is concerned about their child’s education, the school staff should know what to do and respectfully work with the parent. If they don’t respond, the parent gives up and stops trying to engage with the school.”

Perspectives of Families from Diverse Backgrounds

“Parent involvement encompasses a multitude of complex phenomena. Differences in the family structure, culture, ethnic background, social class, age and gender represent only a few of the factors affecting interpretations of or generalizations about the nature of parent involvement” (Ferguson, citing Scribner and Scribner, 2001).

Working with diverse families here in Washington State we have learned that, in particular, ethnically and racially diverse families are less likely to be perceived as equal partners in education, and their children are more likely to attend struggling schools. The Education Alliance at Brown University has written about equity issues that influence family access to schools and identified four main factors: knowledge about schools, culture, language, and social status in the larger community. They state: “Families and communities have different perspectives on involvement in their children’s schools. Different understandings of school exist across cultures.”

For example, factors like language or work schedule can affect a family’s ability to communicate clearly with schools or attend school meetings, but do not affect the desire of diverse families, like that of all families, for the best education possible for their children. Diverse families want their children to become college-educated, and are not satisfied when they are sometimes presented instead with vocational options. We heard from parents that when they have a concern about their child, they can be unsure of how to approach educators or speak up for fear of embarrassment; they inadvertently run the risk of ending up labeled “uninvolved” or “uncaring” (PAC).

In thinking about leveraging families’ contributions as essential partners in education, the important position that diverse families can hold as cultural ambassadors and liaisons largely has been overlooked. Parents, extended family, and community members play a pivotal role in the development and learning of children of diverse backgrounds, but the benefits of inviting their participation often are not recognized. Families can act as cultural advisors and brokers, social networkers, and links between schools and communities, greatly facilitating everything from outreach efforts to helping school staff develop culturally relevant instructional strategies.

Diverse parents are eager to get involved in public schools. But they want to feel invited. They need a sense that a school’s doors are open to them. To engage diverse families effectively, schools must attend to and respect cultural differences of all types. In particular, parents of color tell OEO that in order to develop partnerships it is important for schools to *“understand how communities of color are formed, how they work, what they value, and in some cultures, the important role that elders and religious leaders play in education.”*

What Diverse Families Say Schools Should Do

1. Employ culturally competent principals, teachers, and staff members who are trained to understand and address diverse life circumstances.
2. Designate a staff member as a “connector” so that families know of at least one person at the school in whom they can feel comfortable confiding.
3. Establish a consistent school-home communication system that includes regularly translated materials, and interpreters for parent-teacher conferences and high-stakes meetings.
4. Require teachers to call parents directly as soon as children are falling behind academically and ask parents to work together to improve matters.
5. Provide before- and after-school care and homework assistance. Many parents struggle to help their children with homework.
6. Help parents understand the school system and learn how to best participate in the education of their children.

Obstacles to Involvement for All Families

Although lack of time is a common reason for low participation, families who report not feeling connected with their children’s schools also point to other factors. When asked about challenges they encounter, diverse families in particular rate the lack of cultural competence of school staff as the most important obstacle to overcome. All families also identified other obstacles:

- Uncertainty of the role they play in the education of their children and lack of confidence in their own contribution to the educational process;
- Negative past personal experiences;
- Not knowing how to become involved in education;
- The stress and instability of difficult life circumstances;
- Their need to better understand and function within the public education system;
- Lack of clear and consistent information and communication from the school;
- Unfriendly, unwelcoming school atmosphere;
- Lack of school response to parent concerns about their children’s education.

Educator Perspectives

The formal charge of the teaching profession is to deliver instruction to students, but a less formal, equally significant one is to interact with students’ families. Most educators report understanding the importance of partnering with families and acknowledge that they should work to include them, but feel that they lack the knowledge, skills, and cultural competence to do so effectively. Some educators report feeling overwhelmed with work and see parent involvement as an extra burden and a low priority task. Others think “parent involvement” is a program imposed on the school, and wonder if it will disappear, as so many programs do. Many educators tell OEO that they are unsure about the role they play and believe that it is the parents’ responsibility to become involved.

Despite the fact that learning how to partner, interact, and solve problems with parents is an integral part of the teaching profession, developing these skills is not required in teacher and principal college preparatory programs. Educators report to us an urgent need for professional development related to family involvement, conflict prevention and resolution, and cultural competence. According to our research, currently there are no pre-service or in-service training programs in these areas available to Washington educators. Relationships between families and teachers and principals directly affect the academic outcomes of students; these relationships can be adversarial, or instead can be communicative, collaborative, and open.

“In my dream of dreams, I see that every parent in this state knows how to partner with the school, and every school knows how to partner with parents. The school says: you are welcome here, come talk to us, have lunch with your kid, you are welcome at any time. Come learn with us! I don’t know if that will ever happen.”

Member of the OEO Parent Advisory Committee



III. A Message to Public and School Officials

The members of the OEO Parent Advisory Council implore Superintendents, Principals, elected Officials, and the Governor to utilize their leadership positions to set the tone for effective school-family partnerships in Washington State. The following are the PAC’s recommendations:

To School Superintendents and Principals:

“Model parent/community partnerships and speak publicly about your views regarding parents. Require that all school district personnel treat parents respectfully and consider them equal partners in education.”

- Lead by example, provide opportunities for shared communication. Talk directly to parents and respond to their concerns about their children.
- Require customer service plans for schools – families are the customers.
- Invite parents into leadership roles within schools and school districts.
- Develop a school and district annual plan for family involvement. Collect data and evaluate the plan’s effectiveness.
- Train parents to be the best education advocates they can be.
- Provide training to staff on how to be welcoming, friendly, and helpful to families. Include school secretaries, playground and lunchroom supervisors, custodians, bus drivers, counselors, and para-professionals – all staff.
- Develop a culturally competent staff and a school environment that is reflective of the families who are part of your school and school district.
- Use Title I funds that No Child Left Behind (NCLB) earmarks for school-family partnerships.
- Evaluate all district staff on customer service and family involvement practices.

To the Governor and Legislators:

“You are in the enviable position to make a difference by speaking publicly about the value of school-family partnerships and doing something concrete. Help develop a state framework for school-family partnerships and customer service. Find the resources for schools to support partnerships, and set expectations for data collection, evaluation, and improvement of practices.”

- Speak out about the valuable role of parents in education, and the need for school-family partnerships. Make this a public priority.
- Develop state standards for schools to form partnerships with parents.

- Require that schools and school districts develop customer service policies and procedures.
- Pass a law that mandates that all school districts adopt family involvement policies and procedures.
- Develop a grant system to award funds for school districts' efforts to reach out and involve families of color as a way to close the achievement gap.
- Pass a student bill of rights in public education.

To the State Superintendent of Public Instruction:

“Spearhead and support the development of public education policies that help all families and schools work together in welcoming environments focusing on student achievement.”

- Help create state policy and standards of family partnerships for school districts.
- Speak publicly about the value of parents as partners in education and the importance of respectful treatment of all families in public schools.
- Focus on the involvement of families of color and the achievement of their children.
- Survey and analyze the level of customer service present in public schools. Implement corrective measures to raise standards.
- Survey the level of cultural competence in school environments. Implement corrective measures to raise standards.
- Help school districts allocate or re-allocate funds to support their school-family partnership efforts.
- Ensure that districts are spending their Title I funds on school-family partnerships as required by NCLB.

To School Boards:

“Create local policy that sets standards of parent involvement for your schools and defines what partnerships should be like. Monitor policy and procedure implementation and effectiveness.”

- Define what “school-family partnerships” means in your district.
- Create school-family involvement policies and procedures that recognize and respect all parents as partners. Require good customer service and culturally competent school environments.
- Find out whether the schools in your districts utilize Title I funds for school-family partnerships efforts appropriately.
- Help the Superintendent find other funds to support partnerships with families.
- Evaluate the Superintendent on his/her ability to involve families and provide good customer service.
- Invite families to talk to you; listen, respond, and act based on what you hear.
- Make sure the schools in your districts provide interpreters for parent meetings, translate school documents, and do not use children as interpreters.



Over 30 years of national research demonstrates that when parents are part of schools, public education improves and achievement gap closure and dropout prevention efforts succeed.

IV. What Needs to be Done

In order to meet the mandates to improve public education and close the achievement gap, we reiterate that there is an urgent need in Washington State to bring the topic of school-family partnerships to the forefront of discussions at every level of the public system. We have highlighted the perspectives of families and educators, identified obstacles to involvement, and reviewed the recommendations to those in leadership roles. What next?

Sanders and Sheldon (2009) found that home and school traditionally have been considered separate spheres of influence when it comes to student learning. We have found that this perception is still prevalent in Washington schools and does not serve our students well. Educators cannot educate children alone. Public education is a collaborative undertaking.

Authentic family involvement is a way of thinking, acting, and conducting the business of education that acknowledges the contributions of both families and educators to student learning, and leverages the power of working together. Over 30 years of national research demonstrates that when parents are part of schools, public education improves and achievement gap closure and dropout prevention efforts succeed.

To move forward, there needs to be a paradigm shift – a change in mindsets, perceptions, and outdated beliefs regarding families in schools. Parents and educators must develop skills to work together, understand their respective roles, share responsibilities, and respect each other’s contributions. Schools and districts must prioritize the creation of an institutional culture that includes families; they must

design a sustainable model for partnership by developing the professional capacity of principals, teachers, and staff to engage parents, and they must establish the necessary infrastructure to support the model.

Paradigm Shift

Reframing the concept of family involvement

- ❖ *From “parental responsibility” to be involved*
↳ *to **school-home-community partnership.***
- ❖ *From inconsistent practices*
↳ *to **system-wide approach.***
- ❖ *From an external program*
↳ *to **instructional strategy.***
- ❖ *From a “social” context*
↳ *to **student learning focus.***
- ❖ *From compliance*
↳ *to **core institutional values.***
- ❖ *From lack of parent involvement data*
↳ *to **effective data collection.***

We would like to lead the movement to re-define the concept of *parent involvement in education*: the updated concept will reflect a joint effort. The notion of parent or family involvement is one-sided and implies responsibility only on the part of families to become involved, disregarding the role played by the school. The OEO Parent Advisory Council recommends that Washington utilize the term “school-family partnerships” as the common language to describe the updated concept.

OEO agrees that the term “partnership” is more explicit and clear. It suggests equality, shared values, shared vision, and shared responsibility—ideas which all acknowledge the contributions of both families and educators to the education and academic success of children.

Developing Sustainable Models

Partnerships between schools and families do not happen automatically. A stable foundation can be laid by reinforcing the institutional core belief that parents are part of public education and belong in school buildings. But it takes intentionality, planning, and hard work from educators and school administrators to implement systemic changes and design a sustainable model for partnerships.

The best predictors of a model that will be sustainable are: the development and adoption of family involvement policies and procedures, and using professional development to increase the capacity of school staff to effectively involve families.

In 2008, the Office of the Education Ombudsman (OEO), in partnership with the Washington State School Directors Association (WSSDA) created a sample document of family involvement policy and procedure for school districts. Many Washington school districts have already adopted this policy or a version of it. The sample policy is included and begins on page 18 of this report.

Establishing Infrastructure

OEO’s research has found many school districts around the nation and some in Washington State that have demonstrated success in partnering with families. These districts have followed a set of identifiable steps to establish infrastructure that supports their partnership models:

1. **Institutional Core Values** - Develop core values regarding partnerships with families and a district-wide vision. Communicate these to all staff, families, and students.
2. **Policy and Procedure** - Adopt family involvement policies and procedures. Circulate the norms and expectations to all school staff and families.
3. **Funds** - Designate funds for family involvement. Identify and “braid” funds from categorical programs, grants, etc. to pay for related expenses.
4. **Standards** - Establish district standards of family involvement, define roles and responsibilities of parents and school staff, and develop uniform family involvement practices to be implemented district-wide.
5. **Communication** - Create communication systems for parents such as parent pages on district and school websites, e-mail newsletters, automatic-caller messages, translated materials, and interpretation for parent meetings.

6. **Customer Service** - Establish customer service policies and procedures and inform parents of what to do in case of concerns or conflict. Collect and evaluate data.
7. **Staff** - Designate, hire, and train quality district and school staff to focus on family involvement.
8. **A Plan** - Develop a district-wide plan that links family involvement to student learning and closing the achievement gap. Integrate family involvement into instructional goals.
9. **Staff Evaluation** - Evaluate teachers, principals, and all school staff on how they interact with families and involve them in student learning.
10. **Professional Development** - Require and offer professional development classes for district and school staff regarding family involvement and cultural competence.
11. **School Teams** - Require that school buildings establish School-Family Partnership Teams comprised of staff and parents.
12. **Data Collection and Evaluation** - Collect family involvement data and establish an evaluation process that includes family feedback and annual revision of policy implementation.

Effective Strategies

School districts that have successful partnership models develop processes for outreach and response that build relationships with families and invite them to be part of the school.

Home Visits

One of the most effective family involvement strategies is visiting students' homes. Teachers and other school staff visit families at their homes or at other convenient places, to get to know them, establish relationships, ask for their input regarding school issues, and invite them to come to the school to attend upcoming events.

Once a relationship is established, parents feel increasingly comfortable at events like grade-level parent meetings and student-led parent-teacher conferences. Then families can be invited to take part in various volunteer opportunities or workshops to learn how to participate further at the school and support education from home.

Parent Training

Providing training for parents and family members to support student learning from home, understand the school system, and become more involved in education contributes to student academic achievement. Parents gain confidence about communicating with school staff, participating in school events, and partnering with schools to ensure that their children succeed.



“High performing schools understand that families and educators, all stakeholders have a responsibility to educate children.”

Nine Characteristics of High Performing Schools - OSPI

Resources

- **Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI)**

In 2002, OSPI published the first edition of *Nine Characteristics of High Performing Schools* (Shannon & Bylsma, 2002), an analysis of research on what does it take for schools to significantly improved student learning. In 2007, the authors revisited the work and updated it according to new research and recommendations by experts in the field.

The ninth characteristic identified by authors is “High level of Family and Community involvement”. This chapter refers to a substantial body of research that indicates that school-family partnerships contribute to student achievement. It also states that High Performing schools understand that, in addition to families and educators, all stakeholders have a responsibility to educate children.

- **The Washington State School Directors Association (WSSDA) and the Office of the Education Ombudsman (OEO)**

OEO and WSSDA reviewed national research and partnered in the fall of 2008 to create model family involvement policy and procedure to be used by school boards. The sample was distributed to all school board members and all superintendents in the state as well as to parents and the community at large. See page 18.

- **The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL)**

The SEDL currently supports the Parent Information and Resource Centers (PIRCs) in the southwest part of the country, which are funded by USDE grants. They publish an annual literature review of existing school-family partnership research. In the most recent review, *The School-Family Connection: Looking at the Larger Picture* (Ferguson, 2008), SEDL researchers considered over 1000 documents on the topic and created a framework to represent the common characteristics of effective school-family partnerships.

These characteristics include:

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

The actions necessary to foster these characteristics include:

- Prepare all those involved, school staff and families, to support learning and participate in family-school partnerships that encourage meaningful engagement.
- Focus on meaningful outcomes and purposes that relate directly to learning expectations for students.
- Advocate an inclusive educational culture that involves all stakeholders in supporting students in their academic pursuit.

- **The Education Alliance at Brown University**

The Education Alliance, a department at Brown, promotes educational change to provide all students equitable opportunities to succeed. They advocate for populations whose access to excellent education has been limited or denied. Since 1975, they have partnered with schools, districts and state departments of education to apply research findings in developing solutions to educational challenges. They focus on district and school improvement with special attention to underperformance and issues of equity and diversity.

They design and deliver expert services around planning, professional learning, and research and evaluation. Areas of expertise include:

- Diverse Learners
- English Language Learners (ELLs)
- Systems Improvement
- Online Professional Development
- Rigorous Evaluation
- Program & Process Evaluation.

A catalog of available downloadable publications is available on their website:

<http://www.alliance.brown.edu/index.php>

- **Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP)**

Since 1983, HFRP at Harvard University has studied school-family involvement research, successful models and developed a network for educators, parents and other stakeholders around the country. They have a newsletter, FINE, which informs subscribers about new resources, ideas and evaluation methods regarding Family Involvement in education.

HFRP also issued a joint Issue Brief with PTA showcasing promising school district family school partnership programs around the country. The brief identifies five best practices used by these districts and three core district-level components for “systemic family engagement”. The district-level core components require school leadership commitment to:

- Family-school partnerships as key to student achievement.
- Capacity building at the school level through on-going training and funding.
- Continuous outreach to parents in a meaningful way to help them support their children’s academic achievement.

- **National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) at Johns Hopkins University**

Dr. Joyce Epstein is the founder and director of NNPS at John’s Hopkins University in Maryland and social scientist and researcher. Her 2002 seminal work, a result of decades

of experience, introduced a framework for school-family partnerships and described best practices for schools.

Epstein's framework for school-family partnerships has influenced legislation and family involvement policies of states, schools, agencies, and institutions.

Epstein identified and categorized six types of family involvement as an organizational framework for schools to structure how they reach out to families and develop involvement strategies:

- **Parenting** - Help all families establish home environments to support children as students.
 - **Communicating** - Design effective forms of school-to-home communications about school programs and children's progress.
 - **Volunteering** - Recruit and organize parent help and support.
 - **Learning at Home** - Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curricular activities, including academic decisions and planning (Student Learning Plan).
 - **Decision Making** - Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives.
 - **Collaborating with Community** - Identify and integrate resources and services from the community.
- **National Parent Teacher Association (PTA)**

The PTA published an implementation guide this year (2009) for their previously released National Standards for school-family partnerships. Their standards mirror Epstein's six types of family involvement. They are:

 - **Standard 1: Welcoming all families into the school community** - Families are active participants in the life of the school, and feel welcomed, valued, and connected to each other, to school staff, and to what students are learning and doing in class.
 - **Standard 2: Communicating effectively** - Families and school staff engages in regular, meaningful communication about student learning.
 - **Standard 3: Supporting student success** - Families and school staff continuously collaborate to support student learning and healthy development both at home and at school, and have regular opportunities to strengthen their knowledge and skills to do so effectively.
 - **Standard 4: Speaking up for every child** - Families are empowered to be advocates for their own and other children, to ensure that students are treated fairly and have access to learning opportunities that will support their success.
 - **Standard 5: Sharing power** - Families and school staff are equal partners in decisions that affect children and families and together inform, influence, and create policies, practices, and programs.

- **Standard 6: Collaborating with community** - Families and school staff collaborate with community members to connect students, families, and staff to expanded learning opportunities, community services, and civic participation.

- **National Education Association (NEA)**

NEA President Dennis Van Roekel contributes to the organization’s policy brief on parent, family, and community involvement with the following quote: “Parents, families, educators and communities—there’s no better partnership to assure that all students pre-K to high school—have the support and resources they need to succeed in school and in life” (NEA, 2008).

In addition, NEA cites research supporting family school partnerships as “correlating with higher academic performance and school improvement”. Furthermore, this policy brief references Epstein’s Framework for family involvement (Epstein, et al, 2002) and encourages its readers to consider that “successful school-parent community partnerships are not stand-alone projects or add-on programs but are well integrated with the school’s overall mission and goals.”

- **National Middle School Association (NMSA)**

NMSA issued a research summary in its *This We Believe* series on parent involvement (National Middle School Association, 2006). They cite the work of Epstein, et al (2002), describe the outcomes of parent involvement, and make recommendations for increasing parent involvement, all of which align with the research and recommendations from other education stakeholder organizations.

- **National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)**

NASSP identifies school-family partnerships as “an essential component of student achievement in their May 2009 member publication (Christenson, Palan, & Scullin, 2009). This follows their 2007 research report on family involvement which asserts that “a large body of research supports the importance of family involvement in the middle and high school years” (Bouffard & Stephens, 2007) and that such family support for adolescent students “is associated with higher rates of college enrollment” (Zarrett & Eccles, 2006, in Bouffard & Stephens). Bouffard and Stephens also cite research indicating the powerful roles superintendents and principals can play in fostering that involvement.



“Studies show that the correlation between the involvement of families in education and the improvement of student attendance, behavior and academic performance holds true across families of all economic, racial/ethnic and educational backgrounds and students of all ages.”

Henderson & Mapp, 2002

Research

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Sample Policy

Washington State School Directors Association (WSSDA)
Office of the Education Ombudsman (OEO)

Sample District Policy No. 4129

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT POLICY and PROCEDURE

It is the policy of the _____ board of directors to encourage and support family involvement in education at home, in our schools, our community, and in school governance. The board recognizes the diversity of family structures, circumstances, and cultural backgrounds and respects families as important decision makers for their children's education. The Board is committed to the creation and implementation of culturally inclusive and effective school-family partnerships throughout the school district and in each school, and believes these partnerships to be critical to the success of every student. The district's family involvement efforts will be comprehensive and coordinated.

The board recognizes that family involvement in education has a positive effect on student achievement and is an important strategy in reducing achievement gaps. The intent of this policy is to create and maintain a district-wide climate conducive to the involvement of families and to develop and sustain partnerships that support student learning and positive child and youth development in all schools.

The board is committed to professional development opportunities for staff and leadership to enhance understanding of effective family involvement strategies. The board also recognizes the importance of administrative leadership in setting expectations and creating a climate conducive to school-family partnerships.

In support of the implementation of this policy, a copy will be distributed to all schools, school staff, families, teachers and community members. Further, the district will provide support and guidance, to parents and teachers as they plan and implement effective family involvement efforts.

The _____ board of directors support the development, implementation and regular evaluation of family involvement efforts that includes parents and family members at all grade levels in a variety of roles. The district will use the results of the evaluation to enhance school-family partnerships within the district.

The superintendent will develop procedures to implement this policy.

Adoption Date:

School District Name

Family Involvement Procedure

Definitions

The term “family” is used to denote parents, extended family, guardians, or other persons with whom the student lives. “Parent” or “family” may also include community members or other concerned adults involved in the student’s life, pursuant to state and federal laws surrounding confidentiality.

“Family Involvement” refers to school/family partnerships. It is the collaborative interaction between educators and families in activities that promote student learning and positive child and youth development at home, in school, and in the community, including but not limited to regular, two-way and meaningful communication between parents and school personnel; outreach to families; parent education; volunteering; school decision making; and advocacy.

Implementation

The superintendent will identify a district administrator to supervise the implementation of this policy and procedure, and each school in the district will develop a family involvement plan aligned with their academic goals and/or school improvement plan and, if applicable, Title 1 services. Each plan will be tailored to the realities of school families, be culturally relevant to the school population and delineate strategies to greater family participation in education --particularly families who are economically disadvantaged, have disabilities, have limited English proficiency, have limited literacy, or are of any racial or ethnic minority background.

The district’s family involvement efforts will have six overarching goals. They will include, but not be limited to, the following research-based National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement in schools:

- 1. Communicating** - Effective two-way communication between all parents and schools regarding district policies and procedures, local school operating procedures, and an individual child’s progress.
- 2. Parenting** - Information and programs for parents on how to establish a home environment to support learning and appropriate behavior.
- 3. Student Learning** - Information and programs for parents about how they can assist their own children to learn and meet the student’s short-term and long-term educational goals.
- 4. Volunteering** - Activities to encourage a variety of parental volunteer opportunities in schools both in the classroom and in other areas of the school including attendance at local school programs and events.
- 5. School Decision-Making and Advocacy** - Assistance to develop parental involvement in educational advocacy, including school district task forces and site-based advisory committees.
- 6. Collaborating with Community** - Identification and utilization of community resources to strengthen school and family partnerships and student learning.

In order to achieve these goals the board, district and school staff will comply with the roles and responsibilities that are outlined below.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Board shall

- Establish a district level family partnership committee to advise the Board and to assist the Superintendent in implementing the family involvement policy and procedure at the building and district level. For example, the committee could include parents reflecting the diversity of the schools' families.
- Provide professional development opportunities for teachers and staff to enhance their understanding of effective family involvement strategies.
- Perform regular evaluations of family involvement efforts at each school and in the district.
- Provide activities that will educate families regarding the intellectual and developmental needs of their children. These activities may rely on cooperation between the districts and other agencies or school/community groups. Describe specific activities within the board's goals or strategic plan.
- Implement strategies to involve families in the educational process, including information about opportunities for volunteering and encouraging participation in various school and district activities.
- Provide access to educational resources for parents and families to support the education of their children. For example, a family training center or a family academy for classes and parenting books, magazines and home teaching materials.
- Keep families informed of the objectives of district educational programs as well as of their child's participation and progress with these programs. This could be accomplished through newsletters, the district website, translated materials, school and district reader boards.
- Enable families to participate in district level decision making opportunities. For example, family members may provide input into district policies or district level committees.

The District Administrators and Staff shall

- Allocate staff, time and resources to ensure effective implementation of this policy and procedure.
- Work with staff and families to identify resources needed to implement planned family involvement activities and programs.
- Provide time for teachers to share and replicate successful classroom strategies that promote and increase school-family partnerships.
- Provide training opportunities for school staff to increase their skills in working effectively with all families and to enable them to provide family workshops that link family involvement to student learning.
- Conduct both formal, such as Title 1 parent meetings, and informal, such as coffee chats and breakfast with the principal meetings, to ensure ongoing two-way communications with families.
- Provide a system where teachers, students, and families can resolve problems that arise in ways that promote the best relationships possible allowing them to solve problems first before resorting to the inclusion of principals and other administrators.

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- Provide assistance for families to understand topics such as the state academic content standards, and state and local academic assessments, and how to monitor a child's progress and work with educators to improve the achievement of their children. For example, by publishing information in multiple languages and regularly communicating with families regarding academic requirements.
- Work with staff and families to brainstorm possible activities and actions that are consistent with the family involvement policy and, when appropriate incorporate these into schools' annual goals and/or the school improvement plan.
- Recognize staff, families and community members who promote school-wide family partnerships.
- Monitor and evaluate with district assistance the effectiveness of family partnership efforts in the district.

School Staff shall

- Allocate staff, time and resources to implement this policy at the school level.
- Help families feel welcome by demonstrating excellent customer service and basic courtesy.
- Treat all families and community members with respect; be sensitive to cultural differences and life circumstances among families.
- Be as flexible as possible when scheduling appointments and school events with families.
- Communicate early and positively with families and continue these positive contacts throughout the year, including home visits during the year, if feasible.
- Consider an annual student led conference and/or an annual parents meeting.
- Invite parents and family members to observe and assist in classrooms.
- Offer families opportunities for regular meetings to formulate suggestions and to participate, as appropriate, in decisions relating to the education of their children.
- Share class/school discipline and homework policies with families and follow through in a timely manner if problems arise.
- Involve families in decision-making committees and other site-based councils.

Evaluation

The content and effectiveness of this policy and procedure, and the individual school plans will be evaluated by the Superintendent or his/her appointee annually with regard to the quality and effectiveness of the strategies presented in the plan. The findings of the evaluation will be used to design strategies for more effective family involvement, and if necessary to revise this policy and procedure.

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Date: 10.08



The Office of the Education Ombudsman

The Office of the Education Ombudsman (OEO) is an agency within the Governor's Office that helps solve conflict and disputes between families and elementary and secondary public schools, and promotes school-family partnerships.

OEO advocates for fair processes for students. Our vision is that Washington State students, families, and educators become empowered partners in a fair, equitable public education system that is responsive and accountable to all.

We listen. We inform. We help solve problems.

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