

Reaching the Hardest-to-Involve Parents

Powerful Partnerships Under NCLB

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Overview of Resource Kit

Chapter 1 Why Parent Involvement?

This chapter reviews the *No Child Left Behind* legislation and its implications for the role schools must play in involving parents in the school. It examines the research evidence about parent involvement and student achievement and provides information about the six types of parent involvement. Hidden parent involvement and its impact on the success of parent programs are examined.

Chapter 2 The Hardest-to-Involve Parents

Chapter 2 provides an introduction to the focus of this resource kit, namely reaching the hardest-to-involve parents. It addresses the barriers they face in coming to the school and offers ideas for breaking down those barriers.

Chapter 3 Recruiting the Parent Partnership Team

Forming a Parent Partnership Team in the school is the focus of Chapter 3. It discusses the purpose, tasks to be performed, and skills required by team members and team leaders. Funding the team is also discussed.

Chapter 4 Building Team Capacity

This chapter suggests ways to encourage consistent attendance and membership on the Parent Partnership Team. Information is provided on building team skills, establishing ground rules, consensus decision making, and agenda development, among other topics.

Chapter 5 Using Data to Evaluate Success

Data gathering and analysis of the data that the team collects help provide information about the performance of the team in reaching its mission. Several needs assessment tools are described, and turnkey forms are provided to help the team plan and evaluate the effort. Ways to reach out to the community are suggested, along with information about improving parenting skills, learning at home, volunteering at school, and encouraging parents to serve on school committees.

Chapter 6 Program Planning

Activities for developing a one-year plan for the school are included in the chapter. Forms are provided for linking school goals with the efforts of the team and for a variety of other tasks. Additional suggested activities give the team a jumpstart toward making improvements in the school immediately.

Chapter 7 Celebrations

This chapter emphasizes the importance of recognizing and communicating the efforts of the team to the school community on a regular basis. End-of-the-year celebrations are discussed as ways to share the team's accomplishments.

References

This section provides full citations for all references cited in the chapters plus many additional resources related to promoting parent involvement.

Appendix A Forms on the CD-ROM

This appendix gathers the forms, letters, surveys, and so forth introduced in the chapters and provided on the CD-ROM.

Appendix B No Child Left Behind Act of 2001: Section 1118e

Section 1118e on parental involvement is reprinted from the legislation.

Appendix C Selected Research Articles

Three journal articles are reprinted in this appendix.

Glossary

Definitions of some of the terms that will be used by the team are provided.

Compact Disk

The accompanying CD-ROM contains copies of the forms introduced in the resource kit in Microsoft Word.

Introduction

The landscape of schools is changing in significant ways. The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB), which incorporates Title I, increases accountability for schools and students. It also allows parents whose children attend an “unsuccessful” school to move their child to another school or receive free after-school tutoring.

Section 1118e of NCLB focuses directly on parents. Until this legislation, parent involvement was a minor priority in Title I designated schools. NCLB gives parents many new rights and requires schools to provide opportunities for parents to be involved in schools.

Reaching the Hardest-to-Involve Parents: Powerful Partnerships Under NCLB is designed to help schools address student achievement by involving *all* parents, including the “hardest-to-involve,” in the education of their children at school and in the home. These hardest-to-involve parents often face barriers to interacting with the school, such as transportation problems, strict work schedules, lack of child care, or difficulty in speaking English, to name a few. Moreover, if their experiences in school were negative, they may approach their children’s education with a negative attitude. These barriers must be brought down if we want make a difference for all our students, regardless of their family situation.

This resource kit shows educators and parents how to organize for action; plan and implement strategies to remove the barriers parents face in being more involved with the school; and evaluate the success of the efforts. All this is accomplished by creating a Parent Partnership Team to initiate and carry out the activities.

You will find a wealth of strategies and a focused plan for reaching the hardest-to-involve parents in this resource kit.

Parent Partnership Team Process

Step	Task	Purpose	Materials Required	Who Is Involved
1	Recruiting the Parent Partnership Team (Chapter 3)	Provide the school community with information about the process and ask for voluntary assistance from parents, teachers, and community members.	Flyers, assessment tools, letters of invitation, thank-you letters	Principal, central office personnel as appropriate
2	Building Team Capacity (Chapter 4)	Strengthen the team's individual and group skills.	Assessment tools, workshop materials, team-building activities	Parent Partnership Team leader and members, principal
3	Using Data to Evaluate Success (Chapter 5)	Establish a level of readiness to participate. Identify issues and general concerns.	Checklists, surveys, scripts, data collection forms, reporting forms	Parent Partnership Team
4	Program Planning (Chapter 6)	Provide activities and strategies to improve parent participation.	Assessments results, district and school goals, specific activities	Parent Partnership Team
5	Celebrations (Chapter 7)	Provide events and other recognition opportunities to celebrate team, individual, and family successes.	Plaques, certificates, prizes, newsletter articles, bulletin board displays	Parent Partnership Team

The Hardest-to-Involve Parents

Chapter 2

Most barriers to parent involvement are found within school practices, not within parents.

– White-Clark & Decker (1996)

Who Are They?

Parents approach the school experience based upon their experience from their own education. If that experience was positive, then they are likely to take a positive approach to their child's school. These parents tend to feel comfortable at school, and some take active and visible roles in the children's education.

The group of hardest-to-involve parents includes those whose school experiences have made them cautious, suspicious, and distrustful when coming into the schools. It also includes parents who face other barriers in becoming more involved. These parents may be poor, employed in low-paying jobs with no time off, or unemployed. They may have transportation, medical, or child care problems. They may not speak English as their first language, have limited literacy skills, or have limited education. They may have had distasteful experiences with social services agencies and see the schools as part of that experience.

How Can We Remove the Barriers?

These hardest-to-involve parents love their children and want them to do well in school, but they lack strategies to remove the barriers preventing them from being more effectively involved in their children's education. There is often much the school can do to remove barriers that prevent parents from becoming more involved.

Transportation

Many parents have difficulty in getting to school for parent conferences, to attend school events, or to volunteer. The school parent teacher association or organization (PTA/PTO) could be enlisted to provide rides to school. Senior citizens could provide the same services. Title I funding allows for transporting parents to the school. Taxis can be hired or school busses can be used to follow a route to pick up parents for school events. Bus tokens can be purchased for parents when public transportation is available.

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Child Care

Parents have real issues regarding child care. Daycare may not be an option for a variety of reasons. The school can provide free child care during school assemblies, workshops, and conferences by arranging for volunteers from the school community, PTA/PTO, citizen groups, or retirees. Adults or high school students can be hired under Title I to provide child care.

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Flexible Scheduling

Many parents work during the school day or in the evening. Some work split schedules that require them to work day and evening hours, making it extremely unlikely that they can attend school-sponsored events. Removing this barrier requires the school to provide a variety of times when parents can attend events and conferences. Some schools hold school events two or three times — morning, afternoon, and evening — or rotate times on a monthly basis. This greatly increases the likelihood that parents can attend. Other communication methods, such as videotapes, can be used to provide the parents with the necessary information if they cannot attend the school function.

Effective Communications

Parents need to be provided information in a clear, readily understandable manner. It is important to plan multiple ways to reach parents with the same information. Strategies include: in print, by telephone message, in other languages, using telephone trees, with a community radio or television message, on the answering machine at the school, and via a direct invitation from classroom teachers and/or other parents.

Trust Building

As mentioned previously, many of the hardest-to-involve parents are distrustful of the school and its staff. Schools need to work proactively toward building trust with families if they want the parents/guardians to be more involved. Trust building is a critical step in getting parents more involved in the life of the school. Here are some ways for teachers to build trust:

- Send parents an introductory letter at the beginning of the year.
- Talk to parents outside of school at arrival and departure times.
- Do not sit behind your desk at conference time. Sit face-to-face with the parent.
- Pay attention to your body language. Begin the conference with positive statements about the student.
- Make good news telephone calls and send weekly written and oral communications to parents about positive classroom activities.
- Listen to what parents have to say before you make your points to ensure that they feel understood.
- Tell parents about yourself and your interests.

Chapter 5 Using Data to Evaluate Success

Parent ✧
Partnership
✧ Team

Survey #4
Parent Involvement



Parent Involvement Questionnaire

Your name _____ Date _____

Your child's name _____ Grade _____

Telephone Numbers: Home _____ Work _____ Can you be contacted at work? Yes No

1. Are you new to our school? Yes No
2. Does the school make you feel **welcome** or **unwelcome** ?
3. How welcome do you feel when coming to our school?
4. How could the school assist you so you would be able to attend school meetings more often?
5. In what ways could the school or teachers assist you with more communication about your child?
6. How could the format of our open house be changed to better meet your needs as a parent?
7. Would you take advantage of child care if it were offered during open houses and other school events?
 Yes No
8. Would you like to be more involved at school? (Check all that apply.)
 - By serving on a school committee
 - PTA/PTO
 - Fund raising
 - Volunteering at school
9. Place a check mark next to all items that you think would improve home-school communications.
 - Assign homework that requires my child to talk with me about things learned in class.
 - Send home clear notices that I can read easily.
 - Contact me if my child is having problems.
 - Invite me personally to programs at the school.

Please share any other thoughts that you might have to assist us on the back of this questionnaire.

Thank You! Please return this form to the school office.

Linking Parent Involvement to School Goals

What goals does your school already have?
(e.g., reading/math achievement, discipline, dropout prevention)

- Record one school goal in the space provided.
- Fill in the team activities in support of that goal.
- Note the focus of parent involvement.

1. Home-focused 2. School-focused 3. Partnership-focused

School Goal	Team Sponsored Activities 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.	Focus of Parent Involvement
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