

Summary of Effective Partnership Practices

Identified by

State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster's Parent Leadership Corps (PLC)
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Members of the PLC identified these practices as examples of what works in their school districts.

Challenge 1. Effective Two-Way Communication

The need for

- listening and feedback
- action and results
- positive attitude

Recommended Practices

Types of effective communication:

- ★ electronic communication:
 - a. daily parent-teacher e-mails
 - b. school websites
 - c. student achievement information on-line
 - d. homework on teacher's voice mail
 - e. programming on public access TV channel
- ★ newsletters:
 - a. monthly school newsletters
 - b. Parent-to-Parent newsletters
 - c. district-wide PTA newsletters
 - d. school newspaper for high school families
- ★ forms:
 - a. teachers ask parents to complete "Help Me Know Your Child"
 - b. teacher introduces herself to parents via letter describing her family, interests, and experience
 - c. conduct volunteer surveys to match parents' strengths and availability with needs of teachers (and promptly respond!)
- ★ meetings:
 - a. monthly parent group meetings with principal
 - b. hold "listening sessions" at middle and high school levels for parents and the school administrator to talk one-on-one
 - c. hold "Ready, Set, Go" parent-teacher-student sessions at start of year
 - d. sponsor Family Learning Nights focused to promote learning-at-home in academic subjects
- ★ weekly take-home folder of student work
- ★ student assignment notebooks parents sign
- ★ place weekly article in local newspaper on school item of interest to parents
- ★ sponsor the FAST Program (Families and Schools Together)
- ★ ask parents to attend first day of school with child

- ★ publicize volunteer opportunities and recognize volunteers
- ★ feature community service booths and information for parents at Early Learning Fair.

Ways schools can **encourage** two-way communication:

- ★ put telephones in classrooms
- ★ communicate school policies to parents
- ★ put school policies in student handbook
- ★ hold student-parent-teacher conferences as teacher home visits or at the work site(s) of employed parents
- ★ coordinate scheduling of parent-teacher conferences so all parents can attend
- ★ place parents on all school committees, including site-based management and hiring committees
- ★ assign a paid partnership coordinator to each school
- ★ keep school library open during summer
- ★ make translators available at parent-teacher meetings for limited or non-English speaking families
- ★ ask school board to devote time and attention to this issue, i.e., make it a school goal and priority

Examples of successful **parent groups** in Wisconsin that encourage school or district communication with parents:

- ★ Parent Table, LaCrosse School District, holds monthly meetings attended by two parents per school site (16). Members and Chair are elected by parents.
- ★ Educational Review Committee, Pecatonica School District
- ★ Title 1 Parent Advisory Committee, Milwaukee Public Schools
- ★ Building-level School Governance Councils have 51% parent membership, MPS

Bottom line:

Two-way home-school communications succeed when schools

- ★ offer parents options and a variety of ways on how and when to communicate
- ★ are flexible and responsive in responding to parents' communications needs and abilities.

Challenge 2. Understanding Effective Family Partnerships

The need for

- a definition of "partnership;" what does it mean?
- understanding the roles of parents, teachers, administrators, volunteers
- recognizing the contributions of parents and other family members at home, at school, and in the community.

Recommendations

Defining partnerships

Schools should help parents understand

- ★ they don't have to be in the school building to be involved
- ★ they are a critical part of "team" committed to child's learning
- ★ their roles as stakeholders in education

Understanding roles:

Schools should clarify

- ★ why parents should be involved
- ★ how middle and high school parents can be involved

Effective practices

- ★ include parent involvement in performance evaluations of school administrators
- ★ importance of parent involvement must be reflected system-wide and should come from the district administrator on down
- ★ hold “community conversations” about important school issues
- ★ family and community town suppers to develop and resolve important school questions
- ★ sponsor potlucks or offer simple suppers to help families attend important school meetings

Challenge 3: Appreciating diversity, including economic, geographic, cultural diversity, and diversity of ability

The need for

- respect and trust among parents, teachers, administrators, community members
- understanding those from diverse background

Recommended Practices

Schools can encourage families and students to appreciate diversity by

- ★ hearing positive, consistent messages from all school staff, from the top down, including the district administrator, principal, and teachers.
- ★ establishing peer mediators to help kids struggling with bullying or other issues.
- ★ asking parent groups, including key clubs and service clubs to highlight awareness of diversity issues and sportsmanship.
- ★ holding listening sessions to air the concerns and issues of minority parents
- ★ holding culture fairs in the school which display the foods, crafts, and customs of many cultures.
- ★ offering, perhaps in cooperation with community organizations, weekly sessions for parents with no or limited English speaking skills, classes to learn English.
- ★ sponsoring exchange programs that allow families to visit or stay in the homes of those from different cultures.
- ★ offering student and family field trips to centers, museums, and other places devoted to supporting persons of non-majority cultures.
- ★ recruiting minority parents to serve on the PTA/PTO Board.
- ★ starting diversity appreciation at Kindergarten and continuing it through Grade 12.
- ★ Using the PRIDE program for middle school students.

Challenge 4. School Finance

The need for

- positive labor-management relations
- flexible revenue caps
- sufficient and equitable funding

Recommended Practices

Schools can involve families, students, and the community in **school finance** issues by

- ★ implementing an Education Foundation, including allowing people to contribute to an Education Foundation through the United Way
- ★ cultivating support from all groups in the community, i.e., don't overlook anyone.
- ★ inviting the business community to have a voice in and participate in funding-related decisions.
- ★ inviting parents, community members and business representatives to serve on a scholarship committee that accepts individual and estate donations.
- ★ co-sponsoring learning opportunities with the community such as theater productions, grant proposals, and recreation facilities.
- ★ hosting or participating in a "Reality Day" that exposes students to the real-life financial demands schools, businesspeople, and families face.

Schools can cultivate **positive labor relations** by

- ★ sponsoring a start-of-year Celebration Day for teachers the first day they report for work. Suggestion: the Port Washington School Board makes the day festive. For past Celebration Days, the Board has invited the high school jazz band to perform, featured an early-morning talk show, and employed the "FISH" philosophy.
- ★ informing teachers how to contact Board members by phone and e-mail as well as of the Board's support and willingness to listen.
- ★ emphasizing the "personal touch." Ask Board members to write and send Holiday greeting cards to all staff or to prepare and serve a meal for teachers.
- ★ sponsoring Employee of the Month or Teacher of the Year awards.
- ★ assigning one Board member to act as liaison for each school building.
- ★ scheduling a time at each Board meeting to publicly recognize teachers.
- ★ reimbursing teachers' costs for making long-distance phone calls from home to students' families.
- ★ hosting an end-of-year banquet to recognize and celebrate the service of retiring teachers and other staff.

Challenge 5. Lack of Time and Resources for Families

- Make the best use of scarce time
- Encourage employers to enable parent workers to have time to participate in their children's education
- Help school staff and families use time wisely

Recommended Practices

Schools can help families reduce time or resource-related stress by

- ★ assembling take-home reading and activity bags
- ★ distributing 3-hole binder to organize school materials at home, complete with 3 holes punched in materials sent home during the year
- ★ establishing and publicizing homework guidelines
- ★ involving older students in efforts to assist younger students' learning
- ★ offering free, in-school activities for children such as dance and karate
- ★ sponsoring an in-school food pantry
- ★ offering workshops or help to parents looking for employment
- ★ sponsoring health screenings or a health clinic in school
- ★ involving students in preparing Meals on Wheels dinners
- ★ creating a clothing "bank" for families in need

- ★ hosting a “back-to-school” drive for donation of school supplies
- ★ hosting community drives for donation of new or gently-used books for students
- ★ actively working with community service groups to establish efforts that meet families’ needs

Examples of community groups or services that work with schools to help families and provide services or enrichment

- ★ local hospitals and EMS,
- ★ police and fire departments
- ★ after-school childcare with YMCA, Boys or Girls Clubs, or others
- ★ local banks to assist families with school fees, tuition for continuing education
- ★ local service groups that assist families experiencing personal or financial crisis
- ★ Joining Forces for Families
- ★ Families and Schools Together
- ★ donated food or supplies by local restaurants
- ★ Junior League
- ★ Family Literacy programs
- ★ A Safe Route to School Program involving neighborhoods
- ★ inviting retired workers to volunteer

Schools can **support employers** who encourage parental involvement in children’s education by

- ★ publicly recognizing the employers
- ★ inviting workers to serve as volunteers in schools who improve the quality of community life.

For more information on effective practices, contact Jane Grinde at the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 608/266-9356, jane.grinde@dpi.state.wi.us