

Connecticut State Board of Education
Hartford

**Position Statement on
School-Family-Community Partnerships for Student Success**

The Connecticut State Board of Education believes education is a shared responsibility throughout a student's life from birth to adulthood. Families, school staff and community members make important contributions to student success and the best results come when all three work together as equal partners. The purpose of these three-way partnerships is to support students' success in school and through life.

A Definition of School-Family-Community Partnerships

The State Board of Education endorses a research-based definition of school-family-community partnerships that can be applied to policies and practices across the state that result in student success.

School-family-community partnerships are:

- ***A shared responsibility*** with schools and other community organizations committed to engaging families in meaningful, culturally respectful ways as well as families actively supporting their children's learning and development;
- ***Continuous across a student's life***, beginning in infancy and extending through college and career preparation programs; and
- ***Carried out everywhere that children learn*** including homes, early childhood education programs, schools, after-school programs, faith-based institutions, playgrounds, and community settings.

Taken together, this definition supports the creation of pathways to partnerships that honor the dynamic, multiple and complementary ways that children learn and grow. Family engagement is everything family members do to support their children's learning, guide them through a complex school system, advocate for them when problems arise, and collaborate with educators and community groups to achieve more equitable and effective learning opportunities. The terms parent or family are intended to mean a natural, adoptive or foster parent, or other adult serving as a parent, such as a close relative, legal or educational guardian and/or a community or agency advocate.

As students become older and more mature, they should and will take increasing responsibility for their learning. Nevertheless, they will need support from the adults in their lives throughout their educational careers.

A Comprehensive Approach

In order to encourage a comprehensive approach to school-family-community partnerships, the Board recommends that school districts develop programs addressing each of the following six standards:

1. ***Parent Education*** – Identify and prioritize as needed, secondary school completion options and English language learning services for parents of school age children. Support the family's essential role in encouraging children's learning at every age and in developing positive parent-child relationships.
2. ***Communicating and creating a welcoming climate*** – Promote ongoing, clear, meaningful, and two-way communication about school programs and student learning, and develop personal relationships among school staff, families, students and community members.
3. ***Volunteering*** – Involve families in instruction and support, both in and out of school, and in creating a family-friendly atmosphere at school.
4. ***Supporting learning at home*** – Involve families in learning and enrichment activities at home and in the community that are linked to academic standards.

5. **Decision-making and advocacy** – Provide opportunities for families to develop and strengthen their leadership roles in school decisions, especially those related to student performance and school improvement.
6. **Collaborating with community** – Provide coordinated access to community resources, serve as a resource to the community and offer opportunities for community service.

To be effective, these standards of engagement should be connected to the goals of the school district's improvement planning, and designed to engage students and families in strengthening specific knowledge and skills identified as needing work by assessment data. Parent and community engagement that is linked to student learning has a greater effect on achievement than more general involvement.

Characteristics of Successful School-Family-Community Partnerships

The State Board of Education recognizes that school-family-community partnerships must focus on activities that are linked to children's learning. They also must reflect the many ways in which families, community organizations and school staff engage with and support one another, from promoting family literacy, to improving schools and advocating for greater educational quality and opportunity.

Successful partnerships are as varied as their local communities, yet they share certain common characteristics. Effective partnerships are:

1. **Respectful** – All partners develop relationships that recognize, respect and build on the diverse strengths, talents, needs, and interests of families and students.
2. **Inclusive** – Staff reach out to all families, especially those who are culturally diverse or have low levels of income. They examine their assumptions and come to know and learn from families as individuals. All families are honored and valued as partners in their children's education.
3. **Flexible** – Partnerships are tailored to all stages of a student's educational career, and offer a variety of times, locations and opportunities for participation.
4. **Democratic** – Families and young people are equal partners with staff, together constructing programs, policies and information. Leadership is open to families, students and other partners.
5. **Systematic** – Partnerships focus on student achievement and help families and community members understand what students are learning and what the district's standards for successful performance mean for different ages and grade levels.

Benefits of High-Quality School-Family-Community Partnership Programs

Research shows that well-planned partnerships among families, school and community members can make a powerful contribution to greater student success. No matter what their income or background, students with involved families tend to have higher grades and test scores, better attendance, and higher rates of homework completion. They enroll in more challenging classes, have better social skills and behavior, and are more likely to graduate and go on to college.

Families and schools also benefit. Families engaged in partnerships have a greater sense of efficacy, stronger social ties and are more likely to continue their own education. Teachers report greater job satisfaction when they work with families, and families who are more involved hold more positive views of teachers and schools. Increased involvement develops feelings of ownership, resulting in greater family and community support for public education.

The State Board of Education understands that it takes more than engaged families and communities to sustain high student achievement. High-performing schools have many characteristics, including high standards and expectations for student learning, effective school leadership as well as high quality curriculum and instruction. Research also shows, however, that successful schools also have strong ties with families and their community. An effective program of school-family-community partnerships is a critical support students require to realize their potential, and one essential step toward eliminating our state's achievement gaps.

References

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