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CT School-Family-Community Partnerships, a project of the State Department of Education, helps educators, parents and community members develop partnerships by providing training and resources designed to promote policies and programs at the local level and to increase public awareness of the positive impact of school-family-community partnerships on student learning.

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Technology Links Families, Schools & Communities*

How can technology be used to increase and support family involvement? This is an important and timely question. Educators who surf the web find the latest education research, profiles of model programs and creative student activities at the click of a mouse. Another click sends e-mail instantly across the ocean. Powerful technologies, like the internet, answering machines, voicemail, video conferencing, and more, draw us together around the world, as well as around the block.

Some schools use these tools to enhance community and family involvement:

- On one school website, parents and the community can read student poetry, peer through a classroom microscope and learn from a student project on "road rage."
- Many school districts inform students, families and community members about school activities through the internet, cable access programs, and voice mail information lines.
- In schools around the country (see inside for Connecticut examples), community or family members with technology experience volunteer to train parents, teachers and students.

The continuing explosion of computer use in the home, at schools, and around the community is by far the most visible trend, although not the only important use of technology. The race to bring schools online is being driven by hundreds of studies showing that technology-rich schools produce impressive results for students, including improved achievement, higher test scores, and better student attitudes. These advantages make it imperative that all children and families have access to vital technologies.

More communities are making it possible for citizens to go online or utilize other forms of communication technology. In response to community need, libraries, community centers, public housing facilities, schools and even shopping malls are creating opportunities for people without home computers, video cameras, etc. to get connected. In 1997, 60% of libraries offered free public access to the internet, for example. This is double the number from a year earlier, and by 2000, all public libraries are expected to be online.

Even so, equal access for *all* families and students remains a concern. The search for creative solutions is a responsibility we all share. Living up to the potential of these technologies not only means that districts, schools and classrooms need to develop websites and other technological capabilities with families and the community in mind, it also requires close attention to the issue of equity so that all families reap the benefits.

* Thanks to "Partners in Learning" written by The Family Connection of St. Joseph College, for the Indiana Partnerships Center for permission to adapt this information.

Family Concerns about Technology

Many parents feel technology has become a requirement for being a productive citizen, and they say their children are not taught enough mathematics, science, and computer technology.

- 80% of Americans feel that teaching computer skills is “absolutely essential” and that it is important to provide public schools with access to global electronic systems such as the internet.
- More than 75% of parents have encouraged their children to use a computer; 86% of this group believes that a computer is the most beneficial and effective product they could buy to expand their children's opportunities.
- 57% of households with a combined annual income of more than \$40,000 have a personal computer; compared with 12 percent of low-income homes with a combined income of less than \$20,000.

Taken from Susan D. Otterbourg, *Using Technology to Strengthen Employee and Family Involvement in Education* (New York: The Conference Board, Inc., 1998).

Get Your School on the Web - for Free!!

Parents want to ensure that their children get the best education available, and schools want an easy way to reach out to parents and the community to make that possible. The Family Education Network (FEN) at <http://familyeducation.com> aims to help parents get more involved in their children's education, and in turn to help children succeed in both school and life. FEN provides parents with the information and resources they need to become more active participants. FEN also provides software and technical support to develop websites, free of charge to parents, teachers, and schools.

Named the World's Best Parenting Website by FamilyPC magazine, the FEN website contains all kinds of wonderful resources to strengthen school-family-community partnerships - everything from articles about child development, learning disabilities, and education trends, to local web pages such as school calendars and curriculum.

A Local Web Site Can Open Doors to Involvement*

Information is key to building strong partnerships, and computers—as unlimited information sources—have great potential for boosting partnerships and increasing family and community involvement in education. Dr. Joyce Epstein, Director of the Center of School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University, has developed a framework of six types of involvement supporting strong partnerships.

This framework provides a helpful structure for planning classroom, school or district web sites to increase family involvement in your community.

1. Helping parents to parent

Pertinent links provide access to information on topics such as child development, child health and safety, or choosing quality child care. A library connection can highlight good parenting books available for loan.

“Ask-a-Parent” might be a local interactive site for peer learning and sharing.

2. Communicating with families

E-mail accounts help families reach teachers and administrators with important information, questions, or comments, and help educators respond quickly.

Classroom web sites featuring student work, class projects, course overviews, or videos of field trips give families a fuller picture of school life. School sites can provide information on attendance, discipline, student and parent rights, daily schedules and more.

3. Volunteering

A **database of volunteer opportunities**—searchable by school, location, grade level, type of activity, or time commitment—could link schools, families and other community members.

Web “internships” might offer families or community members access to computers and training in exchange for help with a school or classroom web site.

4. Learning at home

Family learning activities that reinforce classroom lessons can be posted with teaching units. A list of essential skills would keep parents aware of what students need to know at each grade level.

“Parent refresher pages” might remind parents how to divide fractions or study for a test.

5. Involving families in decision-making

Online agendas and minutes of school board, parent-teacher organization and other meetings keep families informed about decisions that affect them.

Online opportunities to sign-up for school or district level committees and communicate with school board members or parent representatives encourage parent participation. Online discussions or list-serves provide family and community input on issues ranging from class size to redistricting.

6. Collaborating with the community

Links to local resources offer families access to information about services available in their communities. Information about community activities and summer programs keep families posted about out-of-school opportunities.

Alumni web pages provide opportunities for graduates to tie back into their old schools as resources, role models and/or volunteers.

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Welcome to New Teams

Bloomfield
J.P. Vincent

Danbury
Park Avenue

Enfield
John F. Kennedy

Groton
Colonel Ledyard

Hamden
Dunbar
Wintergreen Interdistrict
Magnet

Hartford
Rawson

Killingly
Killingly Central

Meriden
Casimir Pulaski

Middletown
Commodore MacDonough

New Haven
Troup Magnet Academy of
Sciences

New London
Winthrop

Stamford
Rippowam

Vernon
Vernon Center

West Hartford
King Philip
Webster Hill

Winchester
Batcheller

Connecticut's School-Family-Community Partnership Network now includes over 70 schools and continues to grow.

Schools Share Partnership Practices

After-School Computer Club: Parents & Students Work Together

"Six parent volunteers and a 6th grade student made it possible for our school to reinforce language arts and mathematics skills by helping students become more competent with computers" reports Mark Proffitt, Principal at *Lawrence Elementary School* in Middletown. Parent volunteers for an after-school "Computer Club" were lined up a month ahead for the six week program. Five students from each grade were chosen by lottery. The club met with students in grades K-2 on Tuesdays and those in grades 3-5 on Thursdays.

The volunteers and sixth grade student assisted in the installation of curriculum-related software and troubleshooting, and the principal or a classroom teacher was also available. The major challenge was for custodial staff to move the computers out of the classrooms and into the Media Center twice a week and then back the following morning. Due to keen parental and student interest, the club was offered for another six weeks and thirty additional students were able to attend. Kudos to the Lawrence Action Team for an innovative, after-school program bringing parents and students together to maximize use of the school's technological resources.

Norwich Public School's Technology Initiative is "Parent Friendly"

In Norwich, state of the art technology is found in every classroom. At Wequonnec School, for example, parents find that communicating with teachers is easier than ever. They can now phone or e-mail their child's teacher directly, as well as access the school's website. Teachers also report that equipping each classroom with a phone with voicemail, as well as with e-mail has greatly enhanced two-way home-school communication. Busy teachers can respond to e-mail and to their own voicemail according to the changing demands of each day's schedule. The new phone technology can also be used creatively to allow additional teachers to conference with a parent, and it allows conferencing between staff members as well.

Wequonnoc held a five-week pilot session to introduce parents to the new technology. In addition to learning basic computer skills, parents explored the software programs in use in their child's classroom. The program was a great success. Parents find that the new technology has enabled them to get closer to what is going on in the school and classrooms. Teachers and parents are communicating more, and all agree that the new technology is parent-teacher friendly.

Family Involvement on the Web

There are thousands of web sites of interest to schools, families and children. Here is a list of some of our favorites to get you started:

SERC includes vast bibliographies of curricula and instructional materials, assessment instruments, in-service education and training materials, professional journals/newsletters and books available for loan, free of charge, as well as descriptions of programs designed to bring specific information to professionals, families, and community members regarding many educational issues. www.rh.edu/serc/

CT Parents Plus provides a great calendar of community family events by region. www.ctparentsplus.org

CT Voices for Children includes advocacy data and information on the pressing needs of area youth, as well as many helpful links, especially regarding children's well-being and health issues. Also contains a wide-ranging calendar of events for those who work to support children. www.ctkidslink.org

National Network of Partnership Schools provides many helpful resources including answers to a long list of commonly asked questions regarding creating and supporting all types of involvement. Offers direct access to researchers, many useful publications and guides, membership information, and much more. www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/

National Parent Information Network provides information on child development, education, parenting and more. Includes exhaustive lists of linked sites for parents and those who work with parents. www.npin.org

The American Library Association offers guidelines that can help you evaluate the quality of a website. Also has links to hundreds of quality sites for parents and kids. www.ala.org/parents/greatsites/

The U.S. Department of Education describes thousands of useful publications and materials related to education, including many related to community and family involvement, all available free of charge. www.ed.gov/pubs/

National Parent Teacher Association includes descriptions of PTA publications, issues and initiatives, calendar of events, links to child advocacy sites and local and state PTA organizations. www.pta.org

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www.state.ct.us/sde/sfcpl/toc.htm



Involving Families Through the Web*

PROVIDED BY CT SCHOOL-FAMILY-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS, A PROJECT OF THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

A CLASSROOM web site could have:	A SCHOOL web site could have:	A DISTRICT web site could have:
<p>An introduction from the teacher</p> <p>Overview of lesson plans & topics</p> <p>Home learning activities & reading lists</p> <p>Homework assignments</p> <p>Classroom newsletters</p> <p>Student writing & art work</p> <p>Individual & group projects</p> <p>Pictures of the teacher & classroom</p> <p>E-mail links to teacher & room parent(s)</p> <p>Pictures & notes from field trips</p> <p>"Want ads" for special project materials, tutors or volunteers</p> <p>Classroom rules & expectations</p> <p>Daily schedules</p> <p>Special recognition & awards</p>	<p>School volunteer opportunities</p> <p>A calendar of events & extra curricular activities</p> <p>School vision, mission & goals</p> <p>"Handbook" with attendance and discipline policies, class schedules, school fees, etc.</p> <p>An ongoing Q & A column</p> <p>School newsletters or bulletins & daily announcements</p> <p>Minutes & news from parent teacher organizations</p> <p>Schoolwide awards & honors</p> <p>Pictures of the school, administrators, teachers and support staff</p> <p>E-mail links to administrators, teachers, counselors, nurse, etc.</p> <p>School facts, figures & history</p> <p>Student work such as writing, art & other projects</p> <p>Detailed course and program descriptions</p> <p>Links to classroom & district sites</p> <p>Lunch menus</p> <p>Registration information</p> <p>A map to locate the school</p> <p>Testing information</p> <p>Alumni directory & "what they are doing now" pages</p>	<p>Essential skills by grade level & subject</p> <p>Database of volunteer opportunities, searchable by location, type of work, age of students, time commitment, etc.</p> <p>Interactive parent discussion groups</p> <p>Child development information</p> <p>Links to local, state, and national parent information and support services</p> <p>District policies on attendance, discipline, etc.</p> <p>Parent & community online discussion groups</p> <p>College planning & tips</p> <p>Special awards & school, staff or student achievements</p> <p>District vision, mission & goals</p> <p>E-mail links to teachers, administrators & support staff</p> <p>Title I information</p> <p>School board agendas & minutes</p> <p>List of current district committees & opportunities for parents to participate & give feedback</p> <p>School-year calendar</p> <p>Textbook and curriculum information</p> <p>Problem-solving steps for parents</p>

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