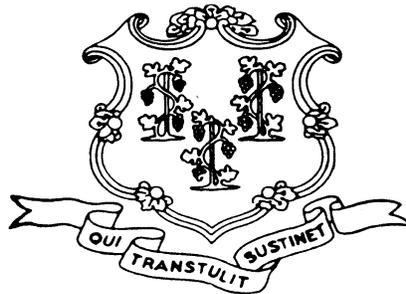


Policy Action Packet  
*for*  
**School–Family–Community**  
**Partnerships**

A Guide to Developing Partnership  
Programs for Student Success



Connecticut State Department of Education  
Connecticut Association of Boards of Education  
Parent-Teacher Association of Connecticut  
Special Education Resource Center

June 1998

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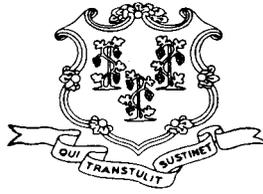
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Commissioner of Higher Education

Theodore S. Sergi

Commissioner of Education



In 1997 the Connecticut General Assembly passed Public Act 97-290. Provisions in the Act are intended to foster meaningful partnerships among schools, families and communities that enhance student learning. Each local and regional board of education is required to develop, adopt and implement written policies and procedures to encourage parent-teacher communication by September 1, 1998.

***The Policy Action Packet for School-Family-Community Partnerships: A Guide to Developing Partnership Programs for Student Success*** is provided to assist school districts and local boards of education in meeting the requirements of Public Act 97-290 and to initiate the steps to more effectively enlist parents and communities in improving the educational results of Connecticut's children. This guide is sponsored by a partnership of the Connecticut State Department of Education, the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, the Parent Teacher Association of Connecticut and the Special Education Resource Center.

This packet contains a sample policy, procedure and agreements that have been developed in school districts or by parent participation specialists around the country. They are offered as models for your consideration to assist you in adopting policies based on the characteristic of your community and with the involvement of families and students in your school district.

We hope you find it useful.

Theodore S. Sergi  
Commissioner  
Connecticut State Department of Education

Robert J. Rader  
Executive Director  
Connecticut Association of Boards  
of Education

Sally A. Boske  
President  
Parent-Teacher Association of Connecticut

Marianne Kirner  
Director  
Special Education Resource Center

June 1998

# Contents

1.	Introduction to the Policy Action Packet	1
2.	What are School-Family-Community Partnerships?	3
	Connecticut State Board of Education Position Statement on School-Family-Community Partnerships	4
3.	Laying the Foundation: 10 Keys to Building Successful School-Family-Community Partnerships	6
4.	The Partnership Policy	10
	Key Components of Policy	10
	The Policy Process	11
5.	Sample School-Family-Community Partnership Policy and Procedure	13
	Indicators of Successful Policy	15
	Sample Partnership Pledges for Family, Student, and School	19
6.	Conclusion: Start with the End in Mind	24
	Key Questions for Getting Started	24
7.	Bibliography	25
8.	Resources	28
9.	Survey and Comment Form	30

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Note: Throughout this document the words parent(s) and family(ies) will be used in the broadest sense to mean those adults with primary responsibility for children. We prefer the use of family to parent because not all responsible agents are parents but most are family, either by relationship or function.

# Introduction to the Policy Action Packet

***School-family-community partnerships work!*** Three decades of research have shown that family involvement improves student learning. This is true whether the child is in preschool or high school, whether the family is affluent or poor, whether or not the parents finished high school (Epstein, 1991; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Lontos, 1992). In fact, the most important predictor of a student's achievement in school is the extent to which that student's family is able to create a home environment that encourages learning, expresses high but not unrealistic expectations for their children's achievement and future careers, and becomes involved in their children's education at school and in the community (e.g., Walberg, 1984; Scott-Jones, 1984; Snow et al., 1991; Chavkin, 1993). In the most comprehensive review of the research literature to date, Henderson and Berla (1994, p. 1) report that **"The evidence is now beyond dispute. When schools work together with families to support learning, children tend to succeed not just in school, but throughout life."**

While there are some fine examples of effective parent involvement practices, most children in most schools do not have the benefit of links between their home and their school (Davies, no date). More work needs to be done to create school-family-community partnerships that are meaningful, ongoing and reach all families. The Policy Action Packet is intended to help Connecticut schools and districts in this effort.

The advice offered in this document is by no means mandatory but is designed to help school districts meet the requirements of Section 14 of Public Act 97-290 which directs school districts to institute a policy on school-family communication by September 1, 1998.

## **Public Act 97-290, Section 14:**

"Not later than September 1, 1998, each local and regional board of education shall develop, adopt and implement written policies and procedures to encourage parent-teacher communication. These policies and procedures may include monthly newsletters, required regular contact with all parents, flexible parent-teacher conferences, drop-in hours for parents, home visits and the use of technology such as homework hot lines to allow parents to check on their children's assignments and students to get assistance if needed."

This guide is sponsored by a partnership of the Connecticut State Department of Education, the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, the Parent-Teacher Association of Connecticut and the Special Education Resource Center. These organizations, as well as many others in the state, are working to support school-family-community partnerships.

We would be interested in any feedback on this document and would also like to receive copies of local policies. A survey and comment form is provided for your use on page 30. Please direct correspondence to Judy Carson at the State Department of Education, 25 Industrial Park Road, Middletown, CT 06457. Thank you.

# What are School-Family-Community Partnerships?

School-family-community partnerships are about working together for student success. A positive relationship between parent involvement and student achievement has been clearly demonstrated in the research literature (e.g., Henderson & Berla, 1994). It is not surprising then that almost every recent attempt to reform or restructure public schools echoes the cry for more parent involvement. For example, Goals 2000, the federal government's National Education Goals for improving education, states as one of the eight goals that "every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional and academic growth of children" (U.S. Department of Education, 1994).

A host of benefits related to parent involvement has been identified for **students** including improved academic achievement, increased language achievement, improved overall school behavior, sustained achievement gains, improved parent-child relationships, increased gains in intelligence for low achievers, improved attitudes and interest in science among adolescents and improved home-school relationships (Bermudez, 1993).

Parent involvement also benefits **parents** themselves, in terms of greater appreciation of their important roles, strengthened social networks, access to information and materials, personal efficacy and motivation to continue their own education (Davies, 1993).

In addition, increased parent and community involvement can bring multiple benefits to **teachers and schools**; for example, the teachers' work can be more manageable, parents who are involved have more positive views of the teacher and the school, and parents and others who participate are likely to be more supportive of the schools.

Similarly, increased linkages between school and community have been shown to have multiple positive results for the **community** including increased access to school resources and facilities, cost saving and improved services through collaboration, increased capacity to solve community problems, and community pride (Davies, 1993).

School-Family-Community Partnerships are defined in a position statement adopted by the Connecticut State Board of Education in August 1997. In order to encourage comprehensive partnerships, the State Board of Education set forth "standards" for school-family-community partnerships as part of this statement (based on Epstein's six-part typology). The Board also recommends strategies that schools, families, communities and the State Department of Education may use in developing and sustaining partnerships. The following two pages contain the full text of the position statement.

## **School-Family-Community Partnerships**

The Connecticut State Board of Education recognizes that education is a shared responsibility throughout a student's entire educational career. Schools, families and communities all contribute to student success, and the best results come when all three work together. A comprehensive, well-planned partnership between family, school and community results in higher student achievement.

### **Definition of School-Family-Community Partnerships**

“The State Board of Education defines school-family-community partnerships as the continuous planning, support and participation of school personnel, families and community organizations in coordinated activities and efforts at home, in the school and in the community that directly and positively affect the success of all children's learning. Each partner is viewed as an equally contributing member, maintaining a certain independence while acknowledging shared responsibility. To succeed, the partnership must be flexible and based upon mutual trust and respect. Schools must take the lead in developing and sustaining effective partnerships.”

### **Three Decades of Research Supports Partnerships**

Research findings indicate school-family-community partnerships result in specific benefits for students, families and schools. Students in schools where there is a strong component of family involvement perform better than those in schools with less involvement. They have higher grades and test scores, better attendance, higher rates of homework completion and fewer placements in special education, and they stay in school longer. In fact, the most accurate predictor of a student's achievement in school is not income or social status, but the extent to which the student's family is involved in his or her education. Families also benefit; they develop a greater understanding of their role in their children's education, a sense of effectiveness, stronger social ties and a desire to continue their own education. Schools and communities benefit. Teachers report that their work becomes easier if they receive help from families, and families who are more involved have more positive views of teachers. Increased involvement also results in families feeling more ownership of their school and being more willing to support school and community initiatives.

An effective partnership offers a broad array of opportunities for schools, families and communities to interact. Not all school-family-community partnerships look the same. Successful partnerships exhibit as much variety as the local conditions that create them. Partnerships work best when they recognize and accommodate differences among families, communities and cultures.

### **Six Standards for Comprehensive Partnerships**

The State Board of Education recognizes that schools must take the lead in developing and sustaining effective partnerships. In order to encourage comprehensive school-family-community partnerships, the Board recommends that schools develop programs related to the following six standards:

1. **parenting** – promote and support parenting skills and the family's primary role in encouraging children's learning at each age and grade level;
2. **communicating** – promote clear two-way communication between the school and families about school programs and children's progress;
3. **volunteering** – provide appropriate training and involve families in instructional and support areas both in and out of the school;
4. **learning at home** – involve families in learning activities at home, including interactive homework and other curriculum-linked or enrichment activities;
5. **decision making** – provide opportunities for all families to develop and strengthen their leadership role in school decisions; and
6. **collaborating with the community** – provide coordinated access to community resources for children and families, and serve as a resource to the community.

Each member of the school-family-community partnership plays a unique and important role in contributing to success for all students. Effective strategies for each partner, derived from current research, are described below.

### **A Role for Schools**

Every school can develop effective strategies to involve all families in the education of their children. The State Board of Education believes that local schools and school districts should engage in specific actions to develop and sustain strong partnership programs: identify district-level goals for school-family-community partnerships; develop structures for systematically and comprehensively implementing the six standards of school-family-community partnerships; provide training and support for teachers, administrators, other staff members and parents in the areas of goals, practices and processes of partnership; monitor progress to learn which practices help schools produce the best results for students, parents, teachers, the school and community; make school facilities available for community and family activities; and contact local businesses, agencies and community organizations to develop collaborations that support school and district goals and programs.

### **A Role for Families**

Families can make critical contributions to student achievement by providing a home environment conducive to lifelong learning. Families can take advantage of opportunities offered by the school to become involved in activities related to the six standards of school-family-community partnerships. Families can also let the school know how they would like to contribute. Families can use and contribute to community resources and help connect other families to the school and community.

### **A Role for Communities**

Service organizations and agencies, religious groups, businesses and individuals can develop networks for communicating with schools and families about information and services that support family involvement in children's education. Community agencies can collaborate to provide integrated family support services that build upon existing community resources and linkages with public schools. Community members can serve as volunteers, role models and mentors, providing more individualized attention for students and demonstrating to both children and staff members that others in their community support education. Businesses can sponsor school-family-community partnership activities and encourage their employees to play an active role in education.

### **State Department of Education Leadership**

The State Board of Education believes that the State Department of Education must provide leadership in developing and promoting comprehensive school-family-community partnership programs and activities that contribute to success for all students. The Department's leadership role includes supporting the standards for comprehensive school-family-community partnerships described above; promoting linkages among state- and local-level partners; and collecting and disseminating information about current research and best practice.

Adopted by the Connecticut State Board of Education  
August 7, 1997

# Laying the Foundation: 10 Keys to Building Successful School-Family-Community Partnerships

There are key pieces of information that can help school-family-community partnerships succeed. The following pages highlight some important considerations for those embarking on partnerships.

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## 1. Learning is the bottom line.

Why are we interested in parent involvement in the first place? We know from overwhelming evidence that parent involvement makes a difference for children's learning. Parent involvement helps to increase students' attendance. If students are in class, they have a better chance of learning than if they are not. Parent involvement also decreases discipline problems. Disruptive students are not learning. Perhaps more important to some educators and policy makers is the fact that parent involvement results in increased students' scores — a win, win, win situation for schools, families and their communities.

## 2. Partnerships not involvement.

We need to move beyond the idea that parents must be involved in *our* enterprise. What is needed is a partnership of schools and families.

Using the term "partnership" rather than "involvement" is important because it helps us capture the idea that responsibility for children is shared across all three contexts of home, school and community. Epstein (1995) elaborates on this concept when she refers to schools, families and communities as overlapping spheres of influence in children's lives.

Many schools now recognize that children benefit most when schools, families and communities all work together. These schools are working **collaboratively** with families and their community. In a collaborative relationship, or partnership, all partners have rights and responsibilities, power and decision-making are shared, and partners share mutual trust and respect (Davies, n.d.). In sum, partnerships are interdependent for the purpose of achieving a common goal — in this case, children's success in school.

The traditional language of parent involvement was focused on schools trying to persuade parents to take part in activities that the school designed and often held during the school day. This approach excluded many parents — often, parents who were interested in helping their children succeed were unable to come into the

school or did not desire to be involved in traditional ways. Some schools were satisfied with keeping their distance from families and communities (Davies, n.d.).

Because schools have the major responsibility for shaping the educational lives of young children, school-family-community partnerships place the responsibility on schools to create and maintain permanent and equitable relationships with all families and their communities (Epstein, 1995). The school has the authority, organization and resources to get a partnership off the ground. Once started, however, the school does not "own" the partnership but must work to empower parents and community members to be equal partners.

When schools, families and communities work in collaboration as partners, they discover that there are many ways they can interact to support children's learning. The key is for the school to offer an array of activities and actively encourage families and community members to become involved so that all find ways to support children's success.

### **3. Involved to do what?**

Parents are busy, too. School staff and organizers need to be clear about what they want parents to do. Most parents are interested in some level of involvement. Parents need to be helped to determine how they can best use their time and talents to support their child's learning. Not all parents can or want to come to meetings at the school. But most parents can and want to enhance the home learning environment. Parents will be aided by specific and practical suggestions. Suggestions, however, need to be varied to meet families circumstances and interests.

### **4. Some barriers can be anticipated.**

In the 1994 hallmark document published by the U.S. Department of Education, *Strong Families, Strong Schools*, four aspects of present day life — time, uncertainty about how to help, cultural barriers and lack of support — are seen as challenges to schools working more closely with families.

#### **a. Time**

Families have many more demands on their time with the rise in dual-earner homes, single-parent homes, having more than one job and the unavailability of extended family. Working families must carry out their household duties in much more limited time. School staff are just as busy and many are parents too, making additional time to talk with children and families difficult to arrange.

#### **b. Uncertainty about how to help**

Many families are unsure how to help their children learn (National Commission on Children, 1991). Others have had negative school experiences and are reluctant to come to school, feeling intimidated and unsure about their contribution. Many parents say they would be willing to spend more time on school work at home if they had some guidance (Epstein, 1987; Henderson, Marburger, & Ooms, 1986). But teachers also need guidance. Very few teacher preparation programs provide new and experienced teachers with coursework in working with families (Radcliffe, Malone, & Nathan, 1994).

### c. Cultural barriers

Our schools today are comprised of children from very diverse families — diverse in their language and cultural background, as well as their views on schools, teaching and their own role in their children's education. In many cases the culture and teaching strategies of the home are unlike those of the school. Students benefit most when their family and school communicate clearly about expectations for student work as well as expectations for parents' involvement. School staff must be trained to work in partnership with the diverse array of families in their community.

### d. Lack of support

Many families want to help their children succeed in school but feel disconnected from schools and their children's learning. To work with *all* families, schools must find multiple ways to engage and support families in their children's education. Schools and school districts must develop policies and programs for family involvement that reach out to all families on a regular basis, providing personal contact, information on parenting, literacy training and family resource centers. Schools must make sure that they reach all families regardless of work schedule, family structure or the language they speak. Schools must also have some agreed upon definitions and concepts of what family involvement looks like, and this may require changes in attitudes on the part of schools and the families they serve.

## **5. Communication is critical.**

Communication is the bedrock of relationships between schools and families. The barriers to creating effective relationships, and then partnerships, can only be overcome through consistent and careful communication. Every word and action that come from the school tell parents how important they are. Effective two-way communication between families and schools is essential to support the child's success in school. Because families are diverse, educators must design many and varied avenues for communication. Issues of language, race, class and culture must be thoughtfully considered. Very often the most effective communication with a parent comes from another parent. Schools need to make better use of involved parents who can act as mediators, advocates and liaisons for other parents. In addition, more effort should be placed on helping to develop leadership skills of those parents interested in performing outreach and organizing activities in the community.

## **6. Build on family strengths.**

There are certain biases that educators *should have* toward families. Educators should presume parents are intelligent, are interested in their children, want to work with schools and will be involved if given the opportunity. They should proceed on the assumption that all parents have something to offer. This means learning to value and affirm the skills and talents that different parents possess. Here again we must be thoughtful about issues of race, class and culture. The diversity of the families that send children to public schools should be considered a community asset, not a problem.

## **7. Importance of fathers.**

There is a movement taking place to reconnect fathers to their families and other social institutions. Recent research shows that children do better in school when their fathers are involved, whether or not their fathers live with them (NCES, 1997). Involving fathers or other significant male role figures is an important, yet often overlooked, way to increase parent involvement overall. How would school-family-community partnership programs fare if success was measured by the extent of father involvement? This seems oversimplified, but programs must be proactive about recruiting fathers and other male role models. When working with fathers it is especially important to be clear about what is being asked of them. Partnerships with fathers will be more successful if schools can be specific and concrete about ways fathers can be involved in their children's education.

## **8. Interdependence.**

Not only are families and schools dependent upon each other for success, but employers, civic and religious organizations and our communities as a whole depend on families and schools producing educated, productive members for our democracy. Since so many community members have a stake in the success of our next generation, they need to share responsibility for being successful. More "partners" need to be brought to the table and helped to understand how they can support families and schools. Perhaps potential partners need to make the same assumptions about each other that they should be making about families: they value children's education, they will be involved if given the opportunity, they have something to offer, etc.

## **9. Effective partnerships are developmental.**

There is no quick fix. The literature on school improvement shows that change takes time. Schools want to work toward long-term relationships, which means that in many cases there are some fences to mend with families. Educators should not expect that changing relationships with families will take any less time, or effort, than any other change process. Once a relationship is developed, partners must also be cognizant of the time and resources required to maintain that relationship.

## **10. Schools must take the lead.**

In school-family-community partnerships, the word "school" is placed first for a reason. It is the school's right and responsibility to take the first step to building a partnership. This does not mean that the school owns the partnership, but the school does own many of the resources that will support a partnership with families. For example, the school owns the schedule, teachers' time, facilities for meetings, various technologies that can support communication and the ability to allocate resources. Parents cannot be expected to come to the school uninvited and unwelcomed. Schools can be intimidating places — many parents will not walk in if school staff do not open the door.

# The Partnership Policy

Crafting meaningful, workable policies can make an important contribution to developing effective partnerships to support children's learning. The first recommendation in the recent publication, *Partnerships for Student Success* by the Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning, cites the importance of policy. The authors of this report state that "only a handful of the nation's 16,000 school districts" have policies related to school-family partnerships (Davies, p. 4). Why are policies important? Policies, meaning written policies, are needed because staff change regularly and it is hoped that a written policy will institutionalize certain practices beyond any one individual's tenure. For similar reasons, policy should be adopted at the school level as well as the district level; school level policies support and extend the district policy. In addition, parents view policies as a commitment that will be fulfilled on the school's part to work with them for their child's success.

It is not enough to develop policy, however. To be effective, policy must be implemented, maintained and evaluated. Each of these activities requires the active support of school and district leadership. The next sections outline some key components of policy on school-family-community partnerships and a suggested process for developing, implementing, maintaining and evaluating that policy.

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## **1. Key Components of Policy**

The National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education (NCPIE), a group of more than 25 education-related organizations, recommends that all district-wide policies on parent involvement contain the following concepts:

- Opportunities for all parents to become involved in decision-making about how the parent involvement programs will be designed, implemented, assessed and strengthened;
- Outreach to encourage participation of parents who might have low-level literacy skills and/or for whom English is not the primary language;
- Regular information for parents about the objectives of educational programs, and on their child's participation and progress in those programs;
- Professional development for teachers and staff to enhance their effectiveness with parents;
- Linkages with special service agencies and community groups to address key family and community issues;
- Involvement of parents of children at all ages and grade levels;
- Opportunities for parents to share in decision-making regarding school policies and procedures affecting their children; and

- Recognition of diverse family structures, circumstances and responsibilities, including differences that might impede parent participation. The person(s) responsible for a child may not be the child's biological parent(s) and policies and programs should include participation by all persons interested in the child's educational progress.

While local districts and schools should consider the key concepts identified above, policy should allow the latitude and flexibility necessary to address the special needs and interests of their community as well as the unique resources of the school.

## **2. The Policy Process**

By using the components above, districts are likely to have a useful and dynamic policy that integrates school-family-community partnerships into the overall mission of the school. A successful policy will help schools operationalize the six standards of school-family-community partnerships:

- ◇ *helping parents to parent*
- ◇ *communicating with families*
- ◇ *expanding volunteer programs*
- ◇ *strengthening learning at home*
- ◇ *involving families in decision making*
- ◇ *collaborating with the community*

The policy process should reach out to members of the broad community that have a stake in children's success including administrators, businesses, community-based organizations, parents, students, teachers, religious institutions and other key stakeholders.

Long-term and effective parent involvement programs grow out of a carefully planned school board policy. Based on information from actual programs, NCPIE recommends the key activities described below for successfully involving parents in their children's education.

### **a. Policy Development**

School districts should support the development of policies in the following ways: (1) assess parent needs and interests about ways of working with schools; and (2) set clear and measurable goals with parent and community input to help foster a sense of cooperation and communication between parents, communities and schools.

Many policies include a statement that the superintendent will report annually to the Board of Education on district and school parent involvement activities. Having families also report to the Board on their experiences with parent involvement programs can add credibility to the school's efforts.

### **b. Policy Implementation**

School districts may support the implementation of policies in the following ways: (1) hire and train a parent liaison to contact parents directly and coordinate parent activities. A parent liaison should, of course, be sensitive to the needs of parents and the community, including the non-English speaking community. Other recommendations for policy implementation include: (2) develop public relations activities to inform parents, businesses and the community about parent involvement policies and programs utilizing a variety of methods and technologies; (3) mobilize parents as volunteers in the school assisting teachers with instructional tasks, lunchroom duties and administrative functions; and (4) train educators to include techniques for surmounting barriers between parents and schools so that teachers, administrators and parents interact as partners.

#### c. Policy Maintenance

It is important not to overlook the maintenance of the policy. After the hard work of developing and implementing the policy, it must be maintained or all of that hard work may not have the payoff it could. Many partnership activities, such as training staff and providing information to families, will need to be repeated regularly to make sure new members of the school community know about the policy and to remind continuing members of its importance.

#### d. Policy Evaluation

School-family-community partnership programs and activities should be evaluated on a regular basis. It is recommended that information feedback mechanisms be established at the outset of any parent involvement initiative. In addition, school staff and their parent and community partners should examine and agree on indicators of the success of their efforts. Those evaluating school-family partnerships are encouraged to use as much "naturally occurring" data as possible to avoid overburdening those involved with an already labor-intensive activity.

# Sample School-Family-Community Partnership Policy and Procedure

## Sample Policy

The Board of Education recognizes that a child's education is a responsibility shared by the school and family during the entire period the child spends in school. To support the goal of the school district to educate all students effectively, the schools and parents must work as knowledgeable partners.

Although families are diverse in culture, language, and needs, they share the school's commitment to the educational success of their children. This school district and the schools within its boundaries, in collaboration with parents, shall establish programs and practices that enhance parent involvement and reflect the specific needs of students and their families.

To this end, the Board supports the development, implementation, and regular evaluation of a parent involvement program in each school, which will involve parents at all grade levels in a variety of roles. The parent involvement programs will be comprehensive and coordinated in nature. They will include, but not be limited to, the following components of successful parent involvement programs:

- Responsible parenting is promoted and supported.
- Communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful.
- Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.
- Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought.
- Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families.
- Community resources are made available to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning.

The Board of Education supports professional development opportunities for staff members to enhance understanding of effective parent involvement strategies. The Board also recognizes the importance of administrative leadership in setting expectations and creating a climate conducive to parental participation.

In addition to programs at the school level, the Board of Education supports the development, implementation, and regular evaluation of a program to involve parents in the decisions and practices of the school district, using to the degree possible, the components listed above.

Engaging parents is essential to improved student achievement. This school district shall foster and support active parent involvement.

Sample policy, procedure and indicators of successful policy are from National PTA (1997) *National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs*. Used with permission.

## **Sample Procedure to Accompany Policy**

In order to develop partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting students' social, emotional and academic growth, this process will be utilized within each school of the district.

### **1. Create an Action Team**

Parents, educators, administrators, and others deemed appropriate must be represented and involved in reaching a common understanding and in setting goals to which all are committed.

### **2. Examine Current Practice**

Review the current status of parent and family involvement. Survey staff and parents to ensure a clear understanding of the current situation. The indicators of successful policy developed by the National PTA (on the following pages) are useful tools.

### **3. Develop a Plan of Improvement**

Based on the evaluation of current practice, identify first steps and priority issues. Pay close attention to developing a comprehensive, well-balanced plan that includes activity in each of the six standard areas.

### **4. Secure Support**

For optimal success, keep stakeholders (those responsible for implementation, those who will be affected, and those outside the school/program who have influence over the outcome) aware of the plan and willing to lend support to its success. Financial resources need to be determined and budgeted.

### **5. Provide Professional Development for School/Program Staff**

Effective training is essential. The best models for training are those that provide staff with several opportunities to interact with the issues, work together, and monitor and evaluate progress.

### **6. Evaluate and Revise the Plan**

Parent and family involvement is not a one-time goal. It merits a process of continuous improvement and a commitment to long-term success.

# Indicators of Successful Policy

The district's implementation plan should include activities in each of the six standards endorsed in the local Board of Education Policy. Districts can examine their policies with regard to each of the six standards using the criteria below. The standards presented here are also the standards adopted by the Connecticut State Board of Education in their Position Statement on School-Family-Community Partnerships. **These indicators can be placed in the district's procedures.**

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## **Standard I: Parenting skills are promoted and supported.**

1. Communicate the importance of positive relationships between parents and their children.
2. Link parents to programs and resources within the community that provide support services to families.
3. Reach out to all families, not just those who attend parent meetings.
4. Establish policies that support and respect family responsibilities, recognizing the variety of parenting traditions and practices within the community's cultural and religious diversity.
5. Provide an accessible parent/family information and resource center to support parents and families with training.
6. Encourage staff members to demonstrate respect for families and the primary role families play in the rearing of children to become responsible adults.

## **Standard II: Communication between home and school is regular, two-way and meaningful.**

1. Use a variety of communication tools on a regular basis, seeking to facilitate two-way interaction through each one.
2. Establish opportunities for parents and educators to share partnering information, such as student strengths and learning preferences.
3. Provide clear information regarding course expectations and offerings, student placement, school activities, student services, and optional programs.
4. Mail report cards and regular progress reports to parents. Provide support services and follow-up conferences as needed.
5. Disseminate information on school reforms, policies, discipline procedures, assessment tools, and school goals, and include parents in any related decision-making process.

6. Conduct conferences with parents at least twice a year, with follow-up as needed. These should accommodate the varied schedules of parents, language differences, and the need for child care.
7. Encourage immediate contact between parents and teacher when concerns arise.
8. Distribute student work for parental comment and review on a regular basis.
9. Translate communications to assist non-English speaking parents.
10. Communicate with parents regarding positive student behavior and achievement, not just regarding misbehavior or failure.
11. Provide opportunities for parents to communicate with principals and other administrative staff.
12. Promote informal activities at which parents, staff, and community members can interact.
13. Provide staff development regarding effective communication techniques and the importance of regular two-way communication between the school and the family.

**Standard III: Parents are welcome in the school and their support and assistance are sought.**

1. Ensure that office staff greetings, signs near the entrances, and any other interactions with parents create a climate in which parents feel valued and welcome.
2. Survey parents regarding their interests, talents, and availability, then coordinate the parent resources with those that exist within the school and among the faculty.
3. Ensure that parents who are unable to volunteer in the school building are given options for helping in other ways, at home and/or place of employment.
4. Organize an easy, accessible program for utilizing parent volunteers, providing ample training on volunteer procedures and school protocol.
5. Develop a system for contacting all parents to assist as the year progresses.
6. Design opportunities for those with limited time and resources to participate by addressing child care, transportation, work schedule requirements, and other needs.
7. Show appreciation for parents' participation, and value their diverse contributions.
8. Educate and assist staff members in creating an inviting climate and effectively utilizing volunteer resources.
9. Ensure that volunteer activities are meaningful and built on volunteer interests and abilities.

**Standard IV: Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning**

1. Seek and encourage parental participation in decision-making that affects students.
2. Inform parents of the expectations for students in each subject at each grade level.
3. Provide information regarding how parents can foster learning at home, give appropriate assistance, monitor homework, and give feedback to teachers.
4. Regularly assign interactive homework that will require students to discuss and interact with their parents about what they are learning in class.
5. Sponsor workshops or distribute information to assist parents in understanding how students can improve skills, get help when needed, meet class expectations, and perform well on assessments.
6. Involve parents in setting student goals each year and in planning for post-secondary education and careers. Encourage parents to be full partners in the development of personalized education plans for each student.
7. Provide opportunities for staff members to learn and share approaches to engaging parents in their child's education.

**Standard V: Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families.**

1. Provide understandable, accessible, and well-publicized processes for influencing decisions, raising issues or concerns, appealing decisions, and resolving problems.
2. Encourage the formation of PTAs and/or other parent groups to identify and respond to issues of interest to parents.
3. Include parents on all decision-making and advisory committees, and ensure adequate training for such areas as policy, curriculum, budget, school reform initiatives, safety, and personnel. Where site governance bodies exist, give equal representation to parents.
4. Provide parents with current information regarding school policies, practices, and both student and school performance data.
5. Enable parents to participate as partners when setting school goals, developing or evaluating programs and policies, or responding to performance data.
6. Encourage and facilitate active parent participation in the decisions that affect students, such as student placement, course selection, and individual personalized education plans.
7. Treat parental concerns with respect and demonstrate genuine interest in developing solutions.
8. Promote parent participation on school district, state, and national committees and issues.

9. Provide training for staff and parents on collaborative partnering and shared decision making.

**Standard VI: Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families and student learning.**

1. Distribute information regarding cultural, recreational, academic, health, social, and other resources that serve families within the community.
2. Develop partnerships with local business and service groups to advance student learning and assist schools and families.
3. Encourage employers to adopt policies and practices that promote and support adult participation in children's education.
4. Foster student participation in community service.
5. Involve community members in school volunteer programs.
6. Disseminate information to the school community, including those without school-age children, regarding school programs and performance.
7. Collaborate with community agencies to provide family support services and adult learning opportunities, enabling parents to participate more fully in activities that support education.
8. Inform staff members of the resources available in the community and strategies for utilizing those resources.
9. Annually, the Superintendent shall report to the Board of Education on the plan developed and implemented in the district's schools to achieve a high level of parental involvement.

# Sample Partnership Pledges for Family, Student, and School

“Pledges” or “contracts” are symbolic agreements that formally recognize that students, families, and schools must work together to help students succeed each year in school. Parallel forms are recommended for students, parents, and teachers. The forms, content and wording of pledges must be appropriate for preschool, elementary, middle and high school levels, reflecting the developmental stages of the students, the organizational characteristics of the schools, and the situations of families as children move through the grades.

By signing parallel pledges, students, parents, and teachers become aware of their common goals, shared responsibilities and personal commitments.

It helps to:

- ➔ Use the term “pledge” instead of “contract” to recognize the voluntary, good-faith nature of these commitments.
- ➔ Keep the list of commitments short and clear. From five to ten items may be considered.
- ➔ Provide two copies so that each teacher and family has a copy signed by the student, parent/guardian and teacher.
- ➔ Implement or improve school practices that enable students and families to fulfill each commitment in the pledges. For example, if parents are asked to communicate with the school, then the school must provide clear information about how to contact teachers, counselors, or administrators. If parents are asked to volunteer, then the school must establish an effective program to recruit and make welcome volunteers.
- ➔ Include an “open” item that students and families can insert to tailor the pledge to their own situations, interests and needs.
- ➔ Develop a full program of partnerships including the six major types of involvement. Pledges are one of many communication strategies that may strengthen school-family connections.

The sample pledges in this section should be tailored to match your school's goals for students and for partnerships. Possible themes for parallel pledges for students, parents and teachers include: student effort, work, and behavior; attendance; communications from school-to-home and home-to-school such as conferences and meetings; homework; volunteers; study habits, appropriate dress; specific school improvement goals and others.

**Note: The sample pledges may be modified to create a pledge for community members to take an active role improving the school and to become school volunteers.**

This page, sample cover letter and pledges reprinted with permission: J. L. Epstein, et al., (1996) *Partnership-2000 Schools Manual*. Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland.

### **Sample Cover Letter Accompanying Pledge**

Dear Students, Families and Teachers,

Our school is strengthening school-family-community partnerships to increase student success. One part of our partnership program asks students, families, and teachers to agree to work together. Please discuss with students the five commitments on the attached pledges, and then please sign your pledge. The pledges will remind us all about the important work that we will do together this year to help students succeed in school.

Signed by Principal

#### Notes:

The cover letter may be written by a teacher, accompanied by one copy of the teachers' signed pledge. In middle and high schools, forms may be changed to refer to multiple teachers. Or, the cover letter to parents may be signed by students, accompanied by copies of the student and teacher pledges.

Other information may be included in the short cover letter such as how the school will return a copy of all pledges to the family, how the school is working to increase family involvement in other ways, and other related information.

# SCHOOL-FAMILY-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

## FAMILY PLEDGE



1. I will help my child to do well in school. I will encourage my child to work hard and cooperate with teachers and other students.
2. I will send my child to school each day with a positive attitude about school and about being a student. If my child is absent due to illness, I will see that the missed work is made up.
3. I will read and respond to communications from the school, and contact the school about questions that I have about school programs or my child's progress. I will participate in parent-teacher-student conferences.
4. I will work with my child at home on interactive activities that enable my child to show me what is being learned in class. I will check to see that my child completes the homework that is assigned.
5. I will volunteer for at least two hours each week at school or at home to conduct activities to assist my child, the teacher, class, and/or community. I will help my child contribute talents to home, school, and community.

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian

# SCHOOL-FAMILY-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

## STUDENT PLEDGE



1. I will do my best in school. I will work hard and cooperate with my teachers and other students.
2. I will attend school each day with a positive attitude about school and about being a student. If I am absent due to illness, I will make up the classwork or homework that I missed.
3. I will take notices home from school promptly, and deliver notices to my teacher from home. I will participate in parent-teacher-student conferences, and talk about school activities and events at home.
4. I will show and discuss homework with my family to share what I am learning in class. I will complete my homework assignments.
5. I will welcome volunteers to my school, and work with parents or others who assist me, my classmates, my teacher, or my school. I will contribute my talents to my family, school, and community.

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

Student

# SCHOOL-FAMILY-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

## TEACHER PLEDGE



1. I will help all my students do their best in school. I will help each student to work hard and cooperate with teachers and students.
2. I will come to school each day with a positive attitude about my students and their families, and with well-prepared classroom lessons to assist students' learning. I also will make sure that families and students know the school's attendance/absence policies and assist them in fulfilling them.
3. I will work to improve communications and information so that all families understand school programs and their children's progress. I will enable families to contact me easily with questions about their children. I also will conduct at least one parent-teacher-student conference with each family.
4. I will use interactive homework that enables students to work with a family member at home to practice or demonstrate skills that we are learning in class. I also will guide families on how to monitor their children's homework.
5. I will arrange ways for parents or other volunteers to assist my students at school, in my class, or at home. I will recruit volunteers to match their time and talents with the needs of my students and programs at school. I also will enable parents to attend events, assemblies, and celebrations at school.

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

# Conclusion:

## Start with the End in Mind

The saying, “start with the end in mind,” is particularly good advice for those developing policy. If policy makers are very clear about what they are trying to achieve, they are more likely to develop a policy process that has integrity, invites partners to the table early in the process and creates a community team on behalf of children. Below are some key questions partners can ask as they work together to develop effective and meaningful school-family-community partnership policies and programs.

### Key Questions for Getting Started

(Epstein, et al., 1996)

- Which practices of partnership are presently strong at each grade level? Which are weak? Which should continue? Be expanded? Be dropped? Be added?
- Are practices coherent and coordinated or fragmented? How are families of children in Title I, special education, bilingual, and other programs part of a schoolwide program of partnership?
- Which families are you reaching and which are you not yet reaching? Who are the hardest families to involve and how might they be included?
- What do teachers expect of families? What do families expect of teachers and others at school?
- What do students expect their families to do to help them with school life and homework? What do students want their schools to do to inform and involve their families?
- How do you want your program of school-family-community partnerships to look three years from now?
- How are your students succeeding on measures of achievement, attitudes, attendance, and other indicators of success? How might school-family-community connections help more students reach school goals?
- What costs are associated with your school’s partnership program and activities? Will small grants or other special budgets be needed? Will staff training be needed? Will money be needed for planning and development activities during summers?
- How will teachers, administrators, and parents be supported and recognized for their work?
- How will you evaluate the implementation and results of your efforts? What indicators, observations, and measures will be used to see how your school-family-community partnerships are progressing?

This is an exciting time for those interested in family and community involvement in schools — a rare opportunity to capitalize on public interest, political will and sound research to improve the educational system for all children. The commitment and enthusiasm of teachers, administrators, families and community members regarding this issue are a testament to its importance. Working together we can forge partnerships for success!

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# Resources

## Connecticut Contacts

Connecticut State Department of Education  
Judy Carson, Education Consultant  
Bureau of Early Childhood Education &  
Social Services  
25 Industrial Park Road  
Middletown, CT 06457  
860/638-4222

Harriet Feldlauder, Education Consultant  
Bureau of Research & Teacher  
Assessment  
P.O. Box 2219  
Hartford, CT 06145-2219  
860/566-5620

Connecticut Association of Boards of  
Education  
Robert J. Rader, Executive Director  
81 Wolcott Hill Road  
Wethersfield, CT 06109-1242  
860/571-7446

Connecticut Association of Partners  
in Education  
Robert Deasy, Jr., President  
PQ Associates Inc.  
406 Farmington Avenue  
Farmington, CT 06032  
860/676-7858

Drugs Don't Work! The Governor's  
Prevention Partnership  
LeAnn G. Beaulieu, Vice President  
30 Arbor Street  
Hartford, CT 06106  
860/523-8042

Parent-Teacher Association of Connecticut  
Sally A. Boske, President  
60 Connolly Parkway  
Hamden, CT 06514-2519  
203/281-6617

Special Education Resource Center  
Barbara Slone, Family Consultant  
25 Industrial Park Road  
Middletown, CT 06457  
860/632-1485

## National Contacts

Center for Law and Education  
1875 Connecticut Ave., NW  
Suite 510  
Washington, DC 20009  
202/986-3000

Family Resource Coalition of America  
20 N. Wacker Drive  
Suite 1100  
Chicago, IL 60606  
312/338-0900

National Coalition for Parent Involvement in  
Education  
1201 16th Street, NW  
Box 39  
Washington, DC 20036  
202/822-8405

National Network of Partnership Schools  
Joyce L. Epstein, Director  
Johns Hopkins University  
3003 N. Charles Street, Suite 200  
Baltimore, MD 21218  
410/516-8800

National PTA  
330 N. Wabash Avenue, Suite 2100  
Chicago, IL 60611-3690  
312/670-6782

Partnership for Family Involvement in  
Education  
U.S. Department of Education  
600 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20202-8173  
1-800-USA-LEARN

## **On-Line Sources**

Children, Youth and Family Consortium  
<http://www.umn.edu/cyfc>

This resource site of the University of Minnesota contains links to other useful web sites organized by categories, chat groups, focused information on topics such as father involvement and work and family issues and general information on children and families.

Connecticut Voices for Children  
<http://www.ctkidslink.org>

Connecticut KidsLink links Connecticut citizens and provides them with current and useful information about matters that impact on children and their families. Founded to help citizens become even better advocates for the well-being of children and youth in all of Connecticut's communities, Connecticut Voices for Children works to ensure that *every* child in Connecticut enters school ready to learn, graduates ready to work, and is safe and healthy.

National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education  
<http://www.ncpie.org/>

A network of members who share information and collaborate on projects to encourage parent and community involvement.

National Parent Information Network  
<http://ericps.ed.uiuc.edu/npin/npinhome.html>

A web site sponsored by two ERIC clearinghouses to foster an exchange of information and resources for parents and those who work with parents.

National PTA  
<http://www.pta.org>

The National PTA web site provides quick access to their documents including their national standards for parent/family involvement programs.

Partnership for Family Involvement in Education  
<http://www.ed.gov/>

Features parent involvement initiatives and resources of the U.S. Department of Education.

## **Connecticut School-Family-Community Partnerships Collection**

The Connecticut State Department of Education and the Special Education Resource Center (SERC) have made available a variety of materials, including books, journals and videos, to help schools develop policies and programs, and to increase the public awareness of the impact that school-family-community partnerships have on student learning. Materials are available for loan, free of charge, at the SERC Library located in Middletown at 25 Industrial Park Road. The library is open Monday through Saturday to the public. For library hours or directions call SERC at 860/632-1485. You may also request an annotated bibliography of the library's materials on this topic.

**Connecticut State  
Department of Education**

**Division of Educational Programs  
and Services**

Leslie M. Averna, Associate Commissioner  
Deborah A. Koval, Publications Coordinator

**Bureau of Early Childhood Education  
and Social Services**

George A. Coleman, Chief  
Judy Carson, Consultant

**Special Education Resource Center**

Marianne Kirner, Director  
Barbara Slone, Consultant

**Division of Teaching and Learning**

Betty J. Sternberg, Associate Commissioner

**Bureau of Curriculum and  
Teacher Standards**

Raymond L. Pecheone, Chief  
Harriet Feldlaufer, Consultant

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