

Involving Parents & Families in Career Pathway Programs

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Introduction

Beyond Bake Sales

Successful career pathway programs across the nation illustrate the importance of a key ingredient: parent and family involvement. The days when parents had contact with their children's schools only through parent-teacher conferences, disciplinary problems, chaperoning and fund-raising are coming to an end as teachers and administrators recognize the connection between student success and family involvement. In fact, parent involvement is one of the eight National Education Goals set forth in the Goals 2000: Educate America Act signed into law in March of 1994: "Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional and academic growth of children."

Parents and Families Are Key Partners

Parents and families are key partners in career pathway programs of all kinds. Educators are learning the importance of involving parents in the design and implementation of these programs. Jobs for the Future notes that "Parents can be either enthusiastic supporters or suspicious opponents of school-to-work programs. A program without parental involvement may not be focused on student needs; program planners should heed parents' concerns."

Parent and family involvement is critical to the success of individual students and the program as a whole. Dianda and McLaren, in a pamphlet on partnerships produced for the NEA, state: "As children's first teachers, family members have a profound and continuing effect on students' growth and development. And for better or worse, what students experience outside school affects their performance in school."

Dorothy Rich, author of *MegaSkills* and other writings geared to helping teachers work with families to strengthen student success, put it well: "We cannot educate children without reaching their parents. Therefore, every teacher has to recognize that when students walk into a class, their families walk in with them." The Partnership for Family Involvement in Education (PFIE) notes that parents often do not feel welcome in their children's schools. In many cases, work schedules and language barriers stand in the way. A PFIE brochure states: "School programs that encourage greater parental involvement are more important than any other factor in determining whether or not parents actually do get involved."

Because many students live in non-traditional family structures, using the term "family" rather than "parents" may be a good idea to avoid the possibility of unintentionally alienating people who, while not biological parents, are fulfilling that role for your students.

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Dorothy Rich

Research Supports Family Involvement

In an NEA online chat in 1997, educator Larry Decker did not mince words in stating his conviction that parent involvement is essential:

Over 30 years of research have proven beyond dispute the positive connection between parent/family involvement and PK-12 student academic success. What we know about the powerful influences of parent/family involvement is broad and clear. For an educator not to actively seek parent/family involvement, and to disregard the positive effects on student academic success, I think is professional malpractice.

Key Research Findings

On its Web site, the National PTA shares the following research findings, based on more than 85 studies, regarding the importance of parent-family involvement in the educational process:

- ✦ When parents are involved, students achieve more, regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnic/racial background, or the parents' education level.
- ✦ The more extensive the parent involvement, the higher the student achievement.
- ✦ When parents are involved in their students' education, those students have higher grades and test scores, better attendance, and complete homework more consistently.
- ✦ When parents are involved, students exhibit more positive attitudes and behavior.
- ✦ Students whose parents are involved in their lives have higher graduation rates and greater enrollment rates in post-secondary education.
- ✦ Different types of parent/family involvement produce different gains. To have long-lasting gains for students, parent involvement activities must be well planned, inclusive, and comprehensive.
- ✦ Educators hold higher expectations of students whose parents collaborate with the teacher. They also hold higher opinions of those parents.
- ✦ In programs that are designed to involve parents in full partnerships, student achievement for disadvantaged children not only improves, it can reach levels that are standard for middle-class children. In addition, the children who are farthest behind make the greatest gains.
- ✦ Children from diverse cultural backgrounds tend to do better when parents and professionals collaborate to bridge the gap between the culture at home and the learning institution.
- ✦ Student behaviors such as alcohol use, violence, and antisocial behavior decrease as parent involvement increases.
- ✦ Students are more likely to fall behind in academic performance if their parents do not participate in school events, develop a working relationship with their child's educators, or keep up with what is happening in their child's school.
- ✦ The benefits of involving parents are not confined to the early years. There are significant gains at all ages and grade levels.
- ✦ Junior and senior high school students whose parents remain involved make better transitions, maintain the quality of their work, and develop realistic plans for their future. Students whose parents are not involved, on the other hand, are more likely to drop out of school.

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- ✦ The most accurate predictor of a student’s achievement in school is not income or social status, but the extent to which that student’s family is able to (a) create a home environment that encourages learning; (b) communicate high, yet reasonable, expectations for their children’s achievement and future careers; and (c) become involved in their children’s education at school and in the community.

Characteristics of Successful Programs

Successful school-family-community partnerships share several characteristics, according to researchers:

- ✦ They focus on prevention rather than treatment.
- ✦ They serve all students and families at a particular site.
- ✦ They consider families full partners in planning and implementation.
- ✦ They involve the entire community.
- ✦ They are integrated into the school’s overall program.
- ✦ They help schools meet important student goals.

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About This Handbook

This handbook is designed to provide suggestions for making families an integral part of your career pathway program. You will find guidelines and examples for a variety of activities that have been used successfully in schools across the nation. Many of these strategies come from two organizations dedicated to strengthening school-family ties: the National PTA and the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education (PFIE). Both organizations have Web sites that contain excellent resources. Another comprehensive resource used in this handbook is Donald Lueder’s book, *Creating Partnerships with Parents: An Educator’s Guide*, in which he describes the implementation of his “self-renewing partnership model.”

The National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs developed by the National PTA provide the framework for the strategies and activities presented in this handbook. Developed in conjunction with the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education, the standards build on the six types of parent involvement identified by Joyce Epstein of the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University:

- ❶ **Parenting:** Help all families establish home environments that support their children as students.
- ❷ **Communicating:** Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and students’ progress.
- ❸ **Volunteering:** Recruit and organize volunteer help and support.
- ❹ **Learning at home:** Provide information and ideas about how to help students at home with homework and curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning.
- ❺ **Decision making:** Include families in school decisions, thereby developing family leaders and representatives.

- ⑥ **Collaborating with the community:** Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and students' learning and development.

The National PTA and other organizations provide a wealth of suggested activities that can be used by schools and individual teachers to promote family involvement and student success. We are including a number of them here for you to adapt for use with your career pathway program.

Home-School Communication

All too often, communication between school and home is a one-way street: from the school to the home. The school sends out report cards or information on schedules and deadlines, the teacher or administrator calls to report unacceptable behavior or failure of the student to complete assignments. When this is the only kind of communication they receive, parents can hardly be expected to spend what for many of them is very limited time and energy cooperating with educators.

The National PTA sets as a standard that “Communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful.” This poses a big challenge for educators, who are already stressed with classroom responsibilities, discipline problems, committee assignments, activity chaperoning, and a host of other duties. However, as illustrated in the research cited in the introduction, establishing partnerships with families has the potential to make other parts of their work less difficult.

Characteristics of Successful

Home-School Communication

- ① Provide clear information regarding course expectations and offerings, student placement, school activities, student services, and optional programs.
- ② Disseminate information on school reforms, policies, discipline procedures, assessment tools, and school goals, and include parents in any related decision-making process.
- ③ Conduct conferences with parents at least twice a year, with follow-up as needed. These should accommodate the varied schedules of parents, language barriers, and the need for child care.
- ④ Encourage immediate contact between parents and teachers when concerns arise.
- ⑤ Translate communications to assist non-English-speaking parents.
- ⑥ Communicate with parents regarding positive student behavior and achievement, not just regarding misbehavior or failure.
- ⑦ Promote informal activities at which parents, staff, and community members can interact.

Suggestions for a Successful Program

Program Orientation

Many career pathway programs begin their year with an open house or parent orientation that brings parents and families on board and sets the tone for a successful year. Postcards should be mailed to each household at least two weeks before the event with date, starting and ending time, location, brief agenda and phone number for additional information clearly indicated.

If program participants include students whose families cannot read English, make every effort to prepare these invitations in their languages. Seeing that you have gone the extra mile to include them makes

these families more receptive to supporting your efforts. If there are sizeable groups of non-English-speaking parents, try to prepare handouts in their languages so they will have an understandable record of information presented at the orientation.

The National PTA suggests including the following in your orientation:

- ✧ Course or program expectations and goals
- ✧ Development and skills information
- ✧ Information on how/when to contact program staff or administration
- ✧ Information on the process for handling questions and concerns
- ✧ Strategies for families to use to support learning at home
- ✧ Information on testing/assessment procedures
- ✧ Question and answer time

They suggest videotaping the event so that parents who are unable to attend will receive the information and feel included.

At their Parent Information Nights, held to inform parents and prospective students about their program, the Palmdale High School Health Careers Academy presents its four-year course of study and course sequences. The evening includes multimedia presentations, student reports, and guidelines for filling out program applications. They also ask parents to volunteer for their Parent Support Team, pointing out the benefits to both parents and the Academy.

A Texas high school holds a fair at the beginning of each school year to help first-year students and their parents get involved. They report that the relaxed atmosphere of an informal party with games and prizes provides an opportunity for staff to explain their program and how it will benefit students, to solicit parent involvement, and a forum for parents and students to voice concerns and questions. (Jobs for the Future)

Lueder suggests holding a family picnic at the school before the opening of the school year to welcome families and provide a low-stress opportunity for family-school interaction. Depending upon the economic circumstances of the school community, the school or student leadership organization (HOSA, for example) can provide some or even all of the food for this event. If transportation and child care are provided, the picnic can be a good way to involve hard-to-reach families.

As part of the picnic activities, students could give parents and new students tours of the school. To add to the festive atmosphere, school music groups could perform. Information about the upcoming academic year can be provided in the form of printed materials handed out to participants, with teachers or administrators available to answer questions, or parents and students could move from the picnic to a brief multimedia presentation or question-answer session indoors while other children participate in supervised activities.

Written Communications

Newsletter

Many programs utilize a regularly scheduled newsletter to inform families about program activities and upcoming events. The newsletter can include a variety of elements, such as:

- ✦ recognition of outstanding student and parent achievement
- ✦ tips for parents to use in helping their students
- ✦ information on understanding report cards
- ✦ ideas for family activities
- ✦ information on school, community and Internet resources for parents
- ✦ brief surveys asking for parent suggestions and comments

If your population includes significant numbers of non-English-speaking families, try to prepare the newsletter in their languages as well. You might want to send copies of your newsletter to local newspapers and to TV and radio stations, which are often looking for interesting stories.

Timeliness and accuracy are key elements of any newsletter, but especially a school newsletter. A simple one-page monthly newsletter mailed to students' homes before any of the scheduled events have taken place is much better than a glossy quarterly containing outdated information. Before mailing the newsletter, take the time to check and double-check every date, location, and name spelling, as well as overall grammar and punctuation. A newsletter with incorrect or outdated information, typos and grammatical errors is worse than no newsletter at all.

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Parent/Family Handbook

Many career pathway programs develop a handbook for parents and families laying out exactly what is involved in the program. East Bakersfield High School Health Careers Academy's handbook, *Getting the Pulse: A Parent's Guide to the Health Careers Academy*, includes information on special activities, staff members, and phone/fax/e-mail contacts in addition to a description of the overall program, course offerings, job shadowing, awards and recognition, and HOSA activities. The handbook opens on an upbeat note, welcoming parents and encouraging them to participate in their student's education:

We hope that you will take an active role in the Academy. The more active you are, the more successful your student will be. We encourage you to visit classes, participate in after-school and weekend activities, and communicate frequently with your teen's teachers. Together, we can make your student's high school career successful and happy.

Parent handbooks could also include information about the school or program policy on assessment and grading, discipline and attendance, as well as student and parent rights and volunteer opportunities. This

would also be a place to include tips for parents on how to help their student succeed in the program. See the Appendix for some sample materials for this purpose.

Other Kinds of Written Communications

In addition to newsletters and handbooks, schools can reach out to families in a variety of ways with the written word. Some suggestions:

Welcoming Letters

The program director can send this letter before the school year begins, welcoming students and families and setting a positive tone for the coming year. Provide some basic information, but focus on conveying a climate of openness and enthusiasm for family involvement. Suggestions:

- ✦ Keep letters short and to the point—a single page is best.
- ✦ Say how much you are looking forward to working with the student and family.
- ✦ Let families know they are welcome and how to arrange for a visit.
- ✦ Encourage families to contact you, and explain when and how to do it.

Letters may not be effective for some families, and they may need to be translated into languages other than English to reach many parents. In the case of hard-to-reach families, telephone calls and/or home visits may be needed to get the information across and establish a two-way communication link.

Postcards

These are an effective and economical way to establish and maintain school-family communication. Cards can be sent before the school year begins to welcome students and their families. They can be sent during the year for positive teacher notes about student progress or accomplishments, or to remind parents of upcoming school activities. A more expensive but effective postcard option is the use of a two-part card that includes a section that families can return postage-free with questions, concerns or survey information. Here again, be sure to provide versions in other languages to reach families where English is the second language.

Telephone Communications

Many parents dread receiving a phone call from their child's teacher or principal, as it usually means bad news. Parents are often hesitant, or do not have an opportunity during school hours, to contact the teacher or the school. That does not have to be the case. The telephone can be an effective tool to promote positive family-school partnerships.

It is important for teachers to have easy access to telephones—one in every classroom, ideally—and time to make phone calls. In some successful programs, parent volunteers or school-home liaisons assist teachers and administrators in maintaining this important line of communication. Roosevelt High School in Dallas hires a parent liaison who calls 30 to 60 parents each day to notify them of school and other meetings and discuss their child's academic and disciplinary status.

Welcoming and Connecting Phone Calls

Lueder suggests beginning the school year with a welcoming telephone call to families, and making periodic connecting calls throughout the school year. As its name implies, the welcoming call is a tool to welcome families to the new year and program, as well as to lay the groundwork for open and positive communication during the coming year. Connecting calls throughout the year serve to enhance the positive family-school relationship.

Guidelines for Effective Phone Contacts

- ★ Begin by telling the family member a little about yourself.
- ★ Be prepared to say something positive about the student.
- ★ Emphasize how much you want to work with the student and family.
- ★ Ask about the student's hobbies, special interests, likes or dislikes.
- ★ Explore special needs that you could help meet.
- ★ Let the family know they are welcome to come to the school. Give them a time when you are available to visit with them.
- ★ Give the family information about when and how they can contact you. Ask about phone numbers and times for you to contact them.

Telephone Tree

In a West Virginia school, Title I funds are used to support a telephone tree program staffed by parent volunteers. Volunteers are trained by school staff on telephone courtesy and parent/teacher confidentiality, and they are also trained to make home visits. They share information and receive instructions at monthly meetings with the principal and parent coordinator.

Each volunteer calls 20 or more families at the end of each month to tell them about upcoming activities, ask for feedback about previous activities, and ask for their suggestions for how the school can better meet their needs. When telephone tree volunteers reported that many parents were concerned that they were unable to assist their children with a new math curriculum, the school offered workshops to bring parents up to speed on the new approach.

Homework Hotline

A number of schools operate an evening homework hotline where students, teachers or volunteers are available to answer questions about homework assignments.

Automated Phone Systems

A recorded phone message system can be part of the home-school communication network, provided it is positive, upbeat, and always up to date. Remember to include the information in other languages if your population includes significant non-English-speaking families. Components could include:

Assignment Hotline

Teachers record class assignment daily or weekly. Students and parents calling the line select their courses/teachers from an opening menu, to which they can return to get additional assignments. An ideal system would have an option for callers to leave voice mail for the teachers. This could also be done through the school's e-mail system in addition to the telephone.

Announcement Line

Updated daily, this line would provide a variety of informative messages about school schedules and special activities. Depending on the community, this could also serve as a means of connecting families with other community resources such as health care, counseling or domestic violence assistance.

Attendance Hotline

Student absences can be placed on this line as well as on e-mail so that parents can check on their child's attendance. This addresses the problem of students erasing phone messages reporting their absence to working parents.

Teacher Voice Mail

Parents and students can call and leave messages for teachers. Teachers can change their greeting daily or weekly to indicate assignments, upcoming class events, etc.

Support for Parenting Skills

According to the National PTA, "School personnel and program staff support positive parenting by respecting and affirming the strengths and skills needed by parents to fulfill their role." These days, parenting roles are not always fulfilled by biological parents, so it is most important for educators to support whoever is undertaking those responsibilities- and to be alert to situations in which nobody is doing so.

Link Families to Community Resources

When families are not able to meet their basic survival needs, they have little energy to devote to cooperating with teachers to enhance their children's education. With the exception of schools in affluent neighborhoods, educators are encountering increasing numbers of impoverished families. In California, a significant percentage of children are classified as living in poverty. This poses very real challenges for educators, who in addition to providing education are often called upon to assist families in meeting other needs. Some ideas to consider implementing:

Qualities of Successful Programs to Support Parenting Skills

- 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, resources, and other services.
- ⑥ Encourage staff members to demonstrate respect for families and the family's primary role in the rearing of children to become responsible adults.

Services and Resource Directory or Yellow Pages

Many communities have directories of social services. In this case, schools can acquire copies to be distributed to parents or used by educators to help parents connect with needed services. When no directory is available, school staff or volunteers can assemble information that includes program descriptions and contact information.

This could be a good project for one of the school's career pathway programs, or be used as a service-learning project. The final product would benefit both the school and the community. Businesses or service clubs might be approached to cover printing costs. The Yellow Pages format would be a simple listing of services and organizations with contact information. This information can also be made available on the school or district Web site.

Family Forums

Informational meetings can be provided on such topics as health services, food stamps, counseling and domestic violence help. Several writers suggest holding these meetings in the various neighborhoods where families needing the services live.

Reach Out to All Families

School administrators and teachers in many districts face a formidable task in establishing partnerships with the widely diverse families and cultures that make up their service area. Suggestions from the National PTA include:

- ❶ Find out which ethnic groups are represented, and offer translators, printed materials in their native language, and other support services to help them feel connected with the educational process. You will need to be sensitive to cultural differences in working with families from different backgrounds. This means things like being aware of holidays and customs of the groups represented, and communicating to the families that you respect and appreciate their traditions.
- ❷ Consult parents before providing special services for their children. This includes such things as special classes, counseling and social services.
- ❸ Assist parents in being parents. Provide free workshops and classes for parents that deal with parenting issues and address other family needs. (See the Appendix for a list of suggested topics.)

Respect Diverse Family Cultures and Traditions

The National PTA suggests finding ways to help students and families value and share their cultures with one another. Making resources available in the parents' first language is key to involving them in their children's education. Holding cultural fairs or celebrating various ethnic holidays is a good way to make students and their families feel included, and to help students appreciate diversity. In some Latino cultures, parental involvement in their children's education is not considered appropriate.

The Developmental Studies Center in Oakland, California, works with schools to help overcome this barrier. Eric Schaps, president, suggests such strategies as movie nights at the school with popcorn and discussion, family heritage days, and interactive homework assignments where students interview parents. (*Christian Science Monitor*)

Involving Families in Student Learning

Educators face competition from work schedules, leisure time activities and a variety of other sources in their efforts to bring parents on board as allies in their children's education. While students whose parents are not involved can succeed, parental involvement is an important contributing factor to student success. The Department of Education idea book, *Family Involvement in Children's Education*, summarizes findings about successful ways of involving the family in student learning:

Schools that are most successful in engaging parents and other family members in support of their children's learning look beyond traditional definitions of parent involvement—participating in a parent-teacher organization or signing quarterly report cards—to a broader conception of parents as full partners in the education of their children. Rather than striving only to increase parent participation in school-based activities, successful schools seek to support families in their activities outside of school that can encourage their children's learning. Schools that have developed successful partnerships with parents view student achievement as a shared responsibility, and all stakeholders—including parents, administrators, teachers, and community leaders—play important roles in supporting children's learning.

A National Education Association publication, *Learning at Home*, suggests the following steps that teachers can take to help parents support student learning:

- ✪ Provide information for families on skills required for students in all subjects at each grade.
- ✪ Provide information on homework policies and how to monitor and discuss schoolwork at home.
- ✪ Provide information on how to assist students to improve skills on various class and school assessments.

Components of Successful

Family Involvement Programs

- 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 the development of a personalized education plan for each student, where parents are full partners.

- ✦ Establish a regular schedule of homework that requires students to discuss and interact with families on what they are learning in class.
- ✦ Create calendars with activities for parents and students at home.
- ✦ Hold family math, science, and reading activities at school.
- ✦ Make summer learning packets or activities.
- ✦ Encourage family participation in setting student goals each year and in planning for college or work.

Family-School Contracts and Compacts

A number of schools and programs are using parent/family-school contracts and compacts to spell out the commitments of each party to the success of the student. Such instruments are actually mandated by Section (d) of The Improving America's Schools Act.

Roosevelt High School in Dallas has a compact spelling out eight parent responsibilities, including ensuring their students attend school, seeking information about their students' progress, and committing to becoming involved in parent groups and activities. School responsibilities include a commitment to offer flexible scheduling of parent meetings, translations of written notifications and interpreters at parent conferences, and a commitment to open the school building to activities that foster the growth of the community.

The Telecommunications Pathway at Salinas High School includes a parent contract whereby parents pledge to support their student and indicate their own willingness to be involved in the pathway program. (See Appendix for sample contracts.)

Volunteering

Parents and families need to feel welcome in their students' schools. In an NEA online chat, educator Larry Decker responded to a question about the one most important thing that individual educators can do to foster parent involvement by stating: "Create a welcoming climate and actively demonstrate their desire to have parents and families involved in the education of their children in whatever way they are able to be involved." With heightened security measures in place to address very real safety concerns in many schools, parents face a challenge even knowing how to get into the school, let alone become involved.

In an NEA online chat, educator Dorothy Rich stated: "It is just plain harder at secondary to involve parents." She suggests four ideas to consider using:

- ❶ Find ways to make sure every parent feels it is important that he or she comes to conferences, comes to meet you, and visits the school.
- ❷ Send notes of invitation as often as needed to make families feel welcome.
- ❸ Recognize each parent with some personal greeting. Ask for pictures of parents when they were students, of their children when they were younger.

- ④ Notice that caring can sometimes mean more than curriculum.

Writing in an *American Teacher* exchange about parent involvement, an educator/parent pointed out some problems:

Many teachers and administrators maintain that parents don't want to be involved. This may be true of some parents, but it's often because they have been alienated from the educational setting. Some of this stems from their own negative school experiences or from the way they feel they are treated.

Unwelcoming atmospheres, rude school staff, lack of access to classrooms and teachers, meetings that are scheduled during normal working hours and lack of meaningful communication from schools contribute to this feeling. Meetings scheduled at 3 or 4 p.m. send the message to working parents that teachers' time is more valuable than parents' time. Too many employed parents don't have the luxury of being able to leave work that early. Schools need to recognize that the rest of the world operates on a different schedule. If schools are sincerely interested in increasing their parental involvement, they must try reaching out, try new ways of involving people when the ways they have traditionally used are ineffective.

In the same article, another educator stated: "Increasing parent involvement is not about losing control by administrators or teachers. It's about recognizing and supporting an essential component of the student achievement equation."

In working with parents as volunteers, educators must keep in mind the differing cultural expectations of the parent-school relationship that exist among families in their school population. Hispanic and Asian families are traditionally less likely to become involved and need special encouragement and support to do so. One expert stated: "There is a division of labor assumed in Asian cultures between parents and teachers. Asians see teaching as a profession. Americans expect parents to teach and teachers to be parents." (James Stigler, *Christian Science Monitor*)

Indicators of Successful Family Volunteer Programs

- ① Ensure that office staff greetings, signage near the entrances, and any other interaction 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 the options for helping in other ways, at home 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 needs, and so forth.
- 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.

Suggested Strategies

Suggestions on making parents/families feel welcome and getting them involved as volunteers:

- ✦ Hang a welcome sign at the school entrance, clearly indicating where to report to sign in and get directions.
- ✦ Post a parent volunteer in the entrance hall to welcome visitors, sign them in, and direct them to classrooms or the office.
- ✦ Use an annual postcard or other form of survey to identify all available talents, times, and locations of volunteers. Provide opportunities to volunteer at the school site at various times of the day, as well as ways parents can contribute in off-school hours and by doing things at home.
- ✦ Establish a parent room or family center for volunteer work, meetings, resources for families. Provide a consistent place and process for volunteers to sign in and out, and encourage them to provide anonymous feedback on their volunteer experience or other elements of the school or program climate.
- ✦ Prepare a volunteer information packet with everything the family member needs to feel confident about his or her role. This could include a welcome letter, parking information, sign-in/out procedures, building map, emergency exit plans, accident procedures, volunteer work locations, contact names and locations for getting assistance. Having parking spaces designated for parents gives a clear signal that they are welcome and important in the school community.

At Rye High School near Pueblo, Colorado, parents from the school accountability committee worked with a school counselor to implement a program called “What’s Next?” to assist students in career planning. Their goal was to work with every student so all would be prepared for life after graduation. They used a classroom that was vacant for two hours each day, a computer obtained through a student-initiated grant application, and a free telephone line supplied by a community partner. During the school day, parent volunteers help students use the Internet to research careers, job opportunities, colleges, technical schools, and scholarships. They help arrange job shadows and meet with classes to establish goals for career development.

The Palmdale High School Health Careers Academy has a terrific parent involvement program including the following elements:

- ✦ **Parent Support Team.** In a continuous review process, parents evaluate the performance of instructors and program activities and the overall progress of the Academy. Parents make suggestions regarding curriculum, help select students for the program, and help keep staff current on developments in the health-care industry. The team provides special scholarships to assist students who cannot afford uniforms or other program essentials.
- ✦ **School District Committees.** Two parents are members of the district’s Health Care and Education Committee, and Academy parents serve on the Principal’s School Climate Panel and the Superintendent’s Parent Advisory Committee.
- ✦ **Mentors and Tutors.** Parents of Palmdale Health Careers Academy students volunteer for special projects such as CPR and first aid training. Parents help with medical terminology and with academic core classes.
- ✦ **Chaperones.** Many parents assist as chaperones on field trips and other off-campus events that include trips to hospitals and colleges, the Kaiser Health Care Conference and various HOSA functions.
- ✦ **Fund-Raising.** Parents fulfill the more traditional role of assisting to raise money for student scholarships and participation in extra-curricular activities.

- ✦ **Awards Ceremony.** Academy parents develop and provide food, decorations and gifts for the annual graduation awards ceremony.
- ✦ **HOSA Activities.** Parents are key players in the HOSA fall and spring leadership conferences, for which students need funding and transportation.
- ✦ **Community Awareness and Senior Projects.** Parents help out with students' community service projects and senior projects.
- ✦ **Training Opportunities.** Parents who are involved in health-care professions are key players in helping arrange training opportunities for Academy students.
- ✦ **Solicit Donations of Equipment and Supplies.** Parents often can get equipment and supplies for the program from their own employers or other community sources. When parents are partners, they understand the needs of their student's program and are enthusiastic about helping to improve it.
- ✦ **Install Equipment.** Parents can be enlisted to assist school personnel in the installation and maintenance of program equipment.
- ✦ **Provide Transportation and Uniforms.** Parents assist in transporting students to community service, training or other off-campus activities. They are also called upon to help when students need special uniforms for their clinical rotations.

Involving Parents in Decision-Making

In all areas of life, we tend to be more committed to programs we have helped to shape, or in which we have at least had some input. Parents who are brought on board early in the career pathway program and kept involved, as described above in the Palmdale program, will be the teacher's best allies. Especially in a career pathway program, parental input can be critical to establishing the workplace and community links necessary for student success.

In a health careers pathway program, for example, parents who are themselves employed in the health-care field can provide valuable contacts for work-based learning opportunities from job shadowing to internships. As employees, their input into curriculum helps ensure that students are learning the things they

Guidelines for Successful Advocacy Programs

- ① Provide understandable, accessible, and well-publicized processes for influencing decisions, raising issues or concerns, appealing decisions, and resolving problems.
- ② 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.
- ③ Provide parents with current information regarding school policies, practices, and both student and school performance data.
- ④ Enable parents to participate as partners when setting school goals, developing or evaluating programs and policies, or responding to performance data.
- ⑤ Encourage and facilitate active parent participation in the decisions that affect students, such as student placement, course selection, and individual personalized education.
- ⑥ Treat parental concerns with respect and demonstrate genuine interest in developing solutions.
- ⑦ Promote parent participation on school district, state, and national committees and issues.

will need to know for actual jobs. In many successful programs, like the Palmdale Academy, parents serve on the advisory board.

The National PTA provides several suggestions for including parents as valued partners in decisions affecting the education of their children:

- ✦ Share annual reports of school performance and program information with parents at an open meeting to review current progress and solicit input for future goals. Respect for parent perspectives fosters increased understanding of school challenges, more effective program goals for improvement, and overall increased parent and community support.
- ✦ Communicate school/program procedures for addressing parent concerns including appropriate contact person and the process for defining the problem and developing and implementing solutions. Publicize successful changes in the school or program as a result of parent initiation and involvement.
- ✦ Include a mini-poll (one question) of parent opinions in each program newsletter, covering a wide range of topics over time. Utilize parent feedback in making school/program decisions.
- ✦ Develop workshops or include parents in ongoing training on relevant topics such as developing parents as advocates, mastering skills for supporting learning, identifying and supporting learning styles, resolving difficulties, and fostering student achievement.
- ✦ Recruit parents to serve on committees dealing with policies and program decisions. To ensure ongoing effective parent participation in the decision-making process, policy makers can work to create an environment where parents can:
 - Attend open meetings on school/program issues
 - Receive clear program goals and objectives
 - Ask questions without fear of intimidation
 - Understand confusing terminology and jargon
 - Monitor the steps taken to reach program goals
 - Assist their children in understanding program expectations and changes

Lueder emphasizes the importance of making sure meetings involving parents and families are well organized and action-oriented. Parents are spending valuable time that could be used for other activities. He states: “The participants need to know and understand the scope and responsibilities of the committee or project. The expected outcome should be clearly stated. The family members must feel their services are wanted and that their comments, suggestions and recommendations will be thoroughly considered.”

Collaborating with Community

Career pathway programs cannot succeed without establishing partnerships with the surrounding community. Schools can harness community resources not only for assisting students in the pathway, but also for strengthening families. Students can give back to the community through service learning projects or other volunteer activities.

The National PTA suggests the following guidelines for developing community partnerships to strengthen schools and families:

- ❶ Distribute information regarding cultural, recreational, academic, health, social, and other resources that serve families within the community.
- ❷ Develop partnerships with local business and service groups to advance student learning and assist schools and families.
- ❸ Encourage employers to adopt policies and practices that promote and support adult participation in children's education.
- ❹ Foster student participation in community service.
- ❺ Involve community members in school volunteer programs.
- ❻ Disseminate information to the school community, including those without school-age children, regarding school programs and performance.
- ❼ Collaborate with community agencies to provide family support services and adult learning opportunities, enabling parents to more fully participate in activities that support education.
- ❽ Inform staff members of the resources available in the community and strategies for utilizing those resources.

In one Vermont community, the annual Celebration of the First Day of School event involves the entire community. Residents are invited to visit one or more schools that day. All area schools have special celebrations, give tours, or use visitors as volunteer aids in classroom. The first year the event was held, more than 120 area employers allowed their employees—not just parents—two hours of paid leave time to visit schools. The local newspaper published letters of support, and a nonprofit corporation is being established to expand the model.

Conclusion

As we have seen, involving parents and families in the educational process makes good sense. In fact, it appears to enhance the family relationship in addition to strengthening student achievement. In a film prepared by the Health Careers Resource Consortium, parents testify to the fact that participating in their student's health careers pathway program has brought them closer together. One parent stated: "My daughter can see that I care for her by the time I spend being involved in her program."

At a time when many four-year college graduates do not have the skills to get a job, students involved in career pathway programs—whether they go on to two-year or four-year colleges or specialized training courses—have a clear advantage in the job market. Through work-based learning experiences and skill development, they have many of the tools they need to set out on the road to career satisfaction and success. Putting in the extra time and effort to include parents and families as an integral part of the career pathway will pay dividends for all concerned. From planning to evaluation, parents and families can provide input and feedback that will help ensure the program fulfills its mission of preparing all students for careers and lifelong learning.

Appendix

Parent Checklist

American Federation of Teachers

Found at www.aft.org/lessons

Do It Every Day:

- ★ Ask your child about school. Get your child talking about school every day.
- ★ Find time for praise and rewards. When your child works hard, completes tough tasks or earns good grades on a test, let him or her know you're proud. Say so with words and rewards.
- ★ Make sure homework gets done.
 - Find a quiet spot in the home for your children to work. Turn off TV and music.
 - Pick a location that is close enough for them to ask you questions about their assignments.
 - Ask to see the finished homework.
 - If your child seems confused or unsure about homework assignments, contact the teacher.
- ★ Place limits on television. Studies have shown that students who watch too much television are more likely to receive poor grades. Limit television to one hour on school nights.
- ★ Make sure your child gets a good night's sleep. Set a regular bedtime. Serve a good breakfast or send your child in time for the school breakfast program.
- ★ Encourage your child to read. Get a public library card. Consider giving books for birthday and holiday gifts. Talk about the newspapers, magazines and books that you read.
- ★ Establish discipline at home. As a parent, grandparent or guardian, you are your child's first teacher. When a student violates school rules, there should be firm but fair consequences at home.
- ★ Make sure your child understands that he or she is expected to comply with the discipline code in school.
- ★ Expect success at school. Children work best when they know you believe in them.
- ★ Watch for report cards and progress reports, and discuss your child's progress with him or her.

Keep in Touch with School

- ★ Let teachers and staff know your concerns. Ask questions. Share your insights about your child.
- ★ Know your child's school family—teacher, principal, support staff. This opens the lines of communication and sends an important message to your child that you think school is important. Get to know your child's teachers as well as any classroom assistants.
- ★ Examine your children's school environment.
 - Attend the open houses at your child's school.
 - Acquaint yourself with school policies.
 - Get a sense of your child's daily routine.
- ★ Don't hesitate to contact your child's teachers. You don't have to wait until there is a problem to establish a positive relationship with your child's teacher. Start at the beginning of the school year.
- ★ Know and understand your school district's academic standards.

- ✪ Know and understand your school's discipline code.
- ✪ Support efforts to adopt and enforce zero-tolerance policies for dangerous and disruptive behavior in school.
- ✪ Work with other parents. Just a little of your time can go a long way in helping your child and his or her school succeed.
 - Attend school board meetings and let school board members know that you support higher standards of student achievement and discipline.
 - Join PTAs or other local school/parent organizations
 - If you have time, serve as a student chaperone on field trips, help the school raise money for special activities or volunteer to assist with other student activities.
 - Talk with other parents about school and what your children are learning.

Keys to a Successful Parent/Family Involvement Program

From the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education (NCPIE)

Found at www.ncpie.org/ncpieguidelines

- ★ Assess families' needs and interests about ways of working with the schools.
- ★ Set clear and measurable objectives based on parent and community input, to help foster a sense of cooperation and communication between families, communities, and schools.
- ★ Hire and train a parent/family liaison to directly contact parents and coordinate family activities. The liaison should be bilingual as needed and sensitive to the needs of family and the community, including the non-English-speaking community.
- ★ Develop multiple outreach mechanisms to inform families, businesses, and the community about family involvement policies and programs through newsletters, slide shows, videotapes, and local newspapers.
- ★ Recognize the importance of a community's historic, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural resources in generating interest in family involvement.
- ★ Use creative forms of communication between educators and families that are personal, goal oriented, and make optimal use of new communication technologies.
- ★ Mobilize parents/families as volunteers in the school assisting with instructional tasks, meal service, and administrative office functions. Family members might also act as invited classroom speakers and volunteer tutors.
- ★ Provide staff development for teachers and administrators to enable them to work effectively with families and with each other as partners in the educational process.
- ★ Ensure access to information about nutrition, healthcare, services for individuals with disabilities, and support provided by schools or community agencies.
- ★ Schedule programs and activities flexibly to reach diverse family groups.
- ★ Evaluate the effectiveness of family involvement programs and activities on a regular basis.

Parents' Roles and Responsibilities

From Jobs for the Future, *School-to-Work Toolkit*

- ✪ Help your child identify skills and further education necessary to enter potential career fields.
- ✪ Help your child make appropriate decisions matching his or her interests, skills, and expectations with program offerings.
- ✪ Consider the possibility of student placements in your place of work.
- ✪ Work with teachers and program staff to offer feedback about your child's experience in the program.
- ✪ Help other parents understand the value of the program for your child.
- ✪ If your child begins to miss class or work assignments, impress upon him or her the need to continue, and work with program staff to support your child's success in the program.
- ✪ If possible, offer to assist with fundraising activities, mailings, and recruitment of employers, students, and parents.
- ✪ After your student graduates from the program, remind him or her to complete and return post-graduation evaluation surveys and questionnaires so the program can continue to improve.

Working with Parents

From Jobs for the Future, *School-to-Work Toolkit*

- ✧ **Ask parents their concerns, and respond to them.** Be ready to respond to typical concerns of parents, such as: Is the program another form of tracking? Will college options still be open to my child? Will my child be forced into making a career choice too early? What sort of job will he or she be doing? Will transportation be made available between the school and the workplace?
- ✧ **Involve parents in program design and ongoing operations.** Parent-teacher organizations can be a good venue for recruitment and orientation.
- ✧ **Invite parents to visit the people and institutions connected with the program.** Making it possible for parents to visit the firm(s) and school(s) where their children will be learning can help them better understand the nature of the program. Providing opportunities for them to better understand the nature of the program. Providing opportunities for them to meet the supervisors and teachers on an informal basis gives parents the chance to discuss their concerns and interests in the program with the people who will be working with their children.
- ✧ **Have parents sign a mutual expectations agreement.** Being party to an agreement with employers, teachers and their child can enlist parents in reinforcing their child's learning.
- ✧ **Stress the guidance and career planning components of your program when marketing to parents.** Students often complain that "no one at school cares." Stressing to parents that special supports will be provided to help students negotiate the demands of the program and make decisions about future education and career goals will help demonstrate to parents that your program is not "business as usual."
- ✧ **Begin your program early in the student's educational process.** Parents are usually enthusiastic about career awareness and job-shadowing opportunities at the elementary or junior high school level. Starting all children in career-focused programs early can lessen the chance that the school-to-career program will be labeled by parents as second best.
- ✧ **Work with community-based organizations.** Community-based organizations are often a voice and advocate for parents. Working with these organizations can be a vehicle for parent communication.

Parent-School Compact

Roosevelt High School, Dallas, Texas

Found at www.ed.gov

The purpose of the parent-school compact is to communicate a common understanding of home and school responsibilities and to assure that every student attains high standards and a quality education.

The Parents' Responsibility

- As an involved parent, I will support my son/daughter by ensuring that they attend school daily and arrive at school on time.
- I will encourage my son/daughter to participate in at least one extracurricular activity.
- I will seek information regarding my son's/daughter's progress by conferring with teachers, principals and other school district personnel.
- I will attend districtwide parent conferences and visit my son's/daughter's classrooms to discuss and participate in their education.
- I will participate in parent groups/activities to contribute to the decision-making process within the Dallas Public Schools.
- I will communicate positive information regarding teachers, principals, and other campus personnel when discussing school with my son/daughter.
- I will encourage my son/daughter to follow the rules and regulations of the school.
- I will encourage my son/daughter to dress according to the district's dress code.

The School's Responsibility

- Roosevelt High School will solicit parent and community input (through meetings, interviews, questionnaires, surveys, etc.) regarding the education of the students it serves.
- Roosevelt will offer flexible scheduling of parent meetings, training sessions, assemblies, school functions to maximize parent participation.
- Roosevelt will provide translations of written notifications and interpreters at parent conferences, parent meetings, and training sessions.
- Roosevelt will give assignments at least once per week. Assignments will be an extension of what is learned in the classroom and not merely "busy work" or untaught concepts that may cause parents and students undue stress at home.
- Parents will be notified of school events in a timely, effective manner.
- Training sessions/workshops on diverse topics and issues will be offered to parents and community members.
- The school buildings will be used to foster the growth and advancement of the community by being offered for parent training workshops, ESL classes, adult basic education classes, computer classes, etc., before, during, and after the regular school day.
- Roosevelt will convey instructional thrusts and initiatives to parents at schoolwide meetings and parent conferences.
- Roosevelt will inform parents of the individual achievement levels of students.

Student _____ Parent _____

Teacher _____

Career Pathway Parent Contract

(based on Salinas High School Telecommunications Pathway contract)

The nature of the Health Careers Pathway program requires each student to accept responsibility and accountability. I understand it is very important to a successful program to have significant parent/family involvement. My signature on this contract demonstrates my commitment to support my student's commitment and participation to achieve all program goals.

Parent's Name _____

Student's Name _____

Street Address _____

Workplace _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Home Phone _____ Work Phone _____ E-Mail _____

I will support my student's participation in this program. Yes No

I believe my student will benefit from this program in the following way(s):

The following talents, skills and abilities will help my student succeed in this program:

I am willing to participate in the program by sharing my time and/or talents. Yes No

If Yes, I would like to participate in the following way(s):

Classroom Assistant

Advisory Board

Mentor/Tutor

Telephone Volunteer

Newsletter Production

Transportation

Fund-Raising

Other _____

I/we agree to support the Health Careers Pathway program to the best of my/our ability.

Parent Signature _____ Date _____

Parent Signature _____ Date _____

Parent/Family Workshop Topics

In his book *Creating Partnerships with Parents*, Lueder includes a comprehensive list of potential topics for workshops and classes that schools can offer for parents and family members. A selection:

Life Skills

- ✧ Improving job skills, finding employment
- ✧ Locating and working with social service agencies
- ✧ Applying for public assistance
- ✧ Obtaining citizenship
- ✧ Locating and selecting daycare
- ✧ Getting utilities restored
- ✧ Home and vehicle maintenance

Self-Help

- ✧ GED preparation
- ✧ Reading, literacy, math skills
- ✧ ESL
- ✧ Foreign languages
- ✧ Communicating with your child
- ✧ Health and nutrition
- ✧ Driver education

Education and Social Issues

- ✧ Helping your child succeed in school
- ✧ Understanding your child's report card, test scores, records
- ✧ Volunteering in the classroom
- ✧ Helping your child with homework, study skills
- ✧ Understanding the transition from middle school to high school, high school to college
- ✧ Student and parent rights and responsibilities
- ✧ Child/adolescent development
- ✧ Drugs, alcohol, gangs
- ✧ AIDS awareness and prevention
- ✧ Sex education, teen pregnancy

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