Connecting schools, families, and communities for youth success

partnerships by design

Cultivating Effective and Meaningful School-Family-Community Partnerships

Creating Communities of Learning & Excellence

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

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Introduction

Why Was This Booklet Written?

Partnerships by Design: Cultivating Effective and Meaningful School-Family-Community Partnerships was written as a complement to the resource and training manual, *Planning for Youth Success* (Dorfman, et al, 2001), which outlines how family and community members can work with school staff and students to set standards for youth success that are unique to the community and create a project around a shared goal. Working through the manual together, representatives of the school community:

- Identify characteristics that are most important for youth to be successful in their community
- Consider ways to determine that students are developing these characteristics
- Identify resources and assets in the community that will help youth develop the desired characteristics
- Plan and implement a project to promote the characteristics, then evaluate the effectiveness of the project, and communicate findings to the public

Partnerships by Design lays a foundation for partnership building that can help facilitate this process.

Partnerships by Design is based on the assumption that many educators have been actively seeking to involve families, but are not getting the results they desire. It is designed to help educators move beyond relying on typical family involvement activities toward building more effective and meaningful school-family-community partnerships within their classrooms, programs, or schools.

How Is This Booklet Unique?

Partnerships by Design is a practical, realistic tool, focused on working with families and the community, that provides easy-to-read information and an efficient planning process. It contains simple forms, worksheets, and activities that will help you write your own school-family-community partnership plan, including:

- Assessing the current state of your collaboration with families and community members
- Forming a vision of what you want your partnerships to look like in the future
- Setting up a plan of action that includes defining simple goals and objectives, outlining options for new partnership activities, and creating a process for regularly evaluating and revising the partnership plan

Partnerships by Design also includes "Ideas for Action"—hints, tips, and practical suggestions for putting your plans into action. Although this booklet is quite comprehensive, the activities can be completed quickly. In just one evening, you can come away with a plan of action that, if followed, can build a foundation for creating, building, and sustaining meaningful school-family-community partnerships.

How To Use This Booklet

Partnerships by Design is written to assist a partnership development team in creating its school (or program) partnership plan. The team should include three to four members from each of the following groups: students, family members, community members, and school staff. If possible, there should be equal numbers of people representing each of these four groups. All four are essential to the process, and each has unique contributions to make and distinctive benefits to receive.

When choosing team participants, the goal is to create a diverse team that will represent all members of your school community. Include, among others, principals, teachers, district personnel, school board members, front office staff, teacher's aides, bus drivers, lunchroom staff, and playground monitors as possible members to represent school staff. Consider parents, stepparents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, foster parents and guardians, siblings, and even close family friends when including family members. When recruiting team members, actively seek those who don't typically volunteer, attend school functions, or hold leadership roles in the school community. Choose team members who have regular and consistent contact with those they represent so they can accurately present the views of their peers, speak knowledgeably on their behalf, and take issues and action items back to them.

Because the partnership development team represents the entire school community, the team can build a sense of community, address the strengths of their practices, identify needed changes and expectations, and link activities to their school improvement goals.

Another unique aspect of *Partnerships by Design* is that it has been written so that anyone can lead the partnership development team through the process—the responsibility to provide leadership does not lie only with the school. The process can be owned by all concerned community members, and the role of leader can be facilitated by anyone who has the time, energy, and desire to handle the task. For instance, many schools work with National Service (AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, and Learn and Serve) volunteers. These volunteers, trained in leadership and capacity building, would be well-suited to lead the process and spearhead many of the school's partnership activities.

Partnerships by Design can also be used as a self-directed study guide. Educators can modify the forms and activities to fit their individual needs, and use the information gained to improve their own practices and increase partnerships.

What You Will Need To Get Started

Have the following items available to help answer questions and provide information when working on your partnership plan:

- Your school improvement plan
- Demographic information about your school and district
- Artifacts (such as school newsletters)
- Specific learning goals for students
- Curriculum plans

Background

Family involvement in education has long been considered an essential component of children's academic success. Parents, teachers, school administrators, and policymakers all agree that family involvement makes a significant difference, and research has shown that increased family involvement boosts student attendance and attitudes toward school, decreases student discipline problems, and increases student achievement and aspirations (Caplan, Choy, & Whitmore, 1992; Henderson & Berla, 1994).

In a 2002 educational needs assessment survey, "fostering a high level of parent involvement in their children's learning" was a very high priority for Northwest teachers, principals, superintendents, and board chairs. It was the number-one issue for teachers and principals in high-poverty schools: more than 90 percent of teachers and 85 percent of principals in such schools rated it as needing more or much more effort (Barnett & Greenough, 2002). These regional findings mirror the national findings that most teachers (83 percent) would like to see the level of parental involvement in their schools increase, with nearly all inner-city educators (95 percent) wanting parents more involved (Binns, Steinberg, & Amorosi, 1997).

While so many see the value in partnerships and want to know more about how to foster high levels of family involvement in their children's learning and in their schools, many educators struggle to get family members involved. They face questions, such as:

- How can we produce meaningful family involvement in our school?
- How can we create effective school-family-community partnerships that include a wide variety of participants?
- How can we involve more family and community members, in addition to the same small core group who regularly come to events and volunteer for activities?
- How can we show that our partnership activities have a positive impact on student achievement?

Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001

In the 2001 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, No Child Left Behind, there was a notable shift in the expected role of parental involvement in schools and an increase in the responsibilities of teachers and administrators. The act includes new provisions increasing parental notification requirements, parental selection of educational options, and parental involvement in school governance. The new law envisions parents as *informed and empowered decisionmakers* in their children's education (Gomez & Greenough, 2002).

Much of the information communicated by the media related to the new law focuses on informing parents of the failures of some schools and providing parents with information regarding their option to transfer their child from a "failing" school to another public school. Instead of focusing only on the negatives, educators can also view the new legislation as creating opportunities and prompting them to ask:

- How can we work more closely with parents as partners in the success of our school?
- How can we use the provisions for increased parental notification as a way to advertise our successes?
- How can we widen the design of the provision of parental choice to include families in the school processes that lead to greater academic achievement and youth success?

Introduction to the *Partnerships by Design* Process

All the above questions and the new legislation beg for an effective partnership plan. Today, two out of three new business ventures fail—mostly due to a lack of a clearly spelled-out business plan. For those who create a solid, well-thought-out plan, success nearly doubles. The same can be said for school-family-community partnerships. If schools fail to plan for effective partnerships, their involvement efforts may not bring about the desired results.

Why have a written partnership plan? Formulating a plan will force you to think about where you want your partnership to go and how you are going to get there. It will become a road map to follow as your partnerships grow and develop—providing a definite direction and a much clearer, focused idea of what can be expected from your partnerships, thus increasing your odds for success. A written plan will help form the guidelines for developing meaningful, well-planned, and long-lasting partnerships.

A partnership plan is a document you create when you take an idea and work through all the factors that will have an impact on the successful start-up, operation, and management of your school-family-community partnerships. The *Partnerships by Design* plan should:

Planning is all about taking your vision and turning it into a reality.

- Define the goals and outcomes for this effort, including both immediate and future directions, and describe the means you will use to attain those goals
- Outline the details of the roles each partner will play in helping reach the overall educational goals
- Anticipate potential barriers along the way and formulate responses to them
- Identify strategies to evaluate the success of the partnerships in meeting the planned goals, and formulate a process to advertise findings and regularly revise the plan

The planning process should answer many questions you may not have thought about as well as prompt questions that may turn into opportunities in the future. Because there is no one formula for success in creating school-family-community partnerships, your plan should be based on your local needs and circumstances. Although creating a plan may take a great deal of time and energy, it will be well worth the effort.

Meaningful Involvement

Being meaningfully involved in education is important not only to family members, but to all stakeholders. Faced with the growing demands to satisfy federal mandates, state requirements, and school policies while ensuring that students make adequate yearly progress, educators want family and community members to be involved in ways that add to student achievement, but do not detract from their teaching nor add additional duties to their overwhelming workload. Stressed out and overloaded from juggling jobs, household responsibilities, and their children's activities, family members want to help their children succeed in education and in life without adding irrelevant activities to their already busy schedules.

Thus, all partners need to know there will be a bottom-line benefit before committing themselves to being involved in school-family-community partnerships. To them, meaningful involvement is participating in a broad, academically significant array of activities that allow partners to help children learn, have a direct impact on student achievement, and help solve real school problems.

Characteristics of meaningful involvement include:

- Parents and staff taking an active interest in the well-being of each child, and school staff members taking an interest in the well-being of each child's family as an extension of the child
- Respecting and valuing families' diverse contributions, and integrating them into the life of the school
- Encouraging parents to assume multiple roles as supporters, ambassadors, teachers, monitors, advocates, and decisionmakers
- Not confining "meaningful family involvement" to activities that take place in the school building

(The Tellin' Stories Project Action Research Group, 2000)

Family Involvement Activities

When educators hear the term "family involvement," they often think of the activities that can be done to get parents involved in the school. This usually includes such things as serving as volunteers; acting as chaperones; working on fund-raising drives; attending athletic, music, and drama events at the school; and participating in PTO/PTA meetings, open houses, and parent/teacher conferences.

Educators often acknowledge that these activities do not reach all families. They may not see how the activities can increase student achievement or how the activities are connected to the overall school improvement goals. The family involvement activities are often seen as add-ons to their regular classroom duties and are only done so they can "check off a box on their family involvement to-do list." Because of this, the activities can be (and are often) done in a way that does not build relationships between the families and the school staff.

For family members, the typical family involvement activities can seem trivial, lack meaning, and provide little connection between the activities they do and the academic success of their children. The activities are often viewed as one-sided, with resources flowing into the school to help support the school's budget or extracurricular programs and activities. The family and community members provide the time, resources (money), and expertise to help children by being involved in the school and in school-sanctioned activities.

Family and Community Members as Consumers

To help family members feel more invested in their child's education, many who are critical of current family involvement strategies advocate for schools to follow the business community's example by adopting a customer service philosophy.

For educators, this customer service philosophy is not about specific activities, but about the way they are educating the children, working with the families, and fulfilling their obligations to the community. This approach is designed to ensure that family and community members feel welcome at school, front office staff are courteous and helpful, and educators and administrators treat parents and students with respect.

The customer service approach asks family and community members for input on issues and for feedback regarding how the school is doing. Public engagement expert Richard Harwood, president of the Harwood Institute, a Maryland-based organization that helps communities learn to work and live together more effectively, disagrees with this approach. In an online article for the Alabama School Board Association, he states that asking family and community members "How are we doing?" has turned them into customers—sending them a signal about where they fit within the school system. He believes the customer service approach in education allows people to think if they pay their tax bill they should get good service and have no obligation beyond that. Further, he believes that community members feel they only need to present their demands to the school, and if they're not met, they can go elsewhere. Why should they "jump over the counter and help in a pinch?"

"In short, approaching the design of and vision for public schools as if serving consumers lets the public avoid its responsibility to those schools as citizens," Harwood argues. "This consumer mentality takes us all off the hook" (Salter, 2001).

Family and Community Members in Partnership With Schools

Partnerships, by definition, are different from the preceding approaches. Partnerships are about building "relationships between individuals or groups that are characterized by mutual cooperation and responsibility, as for the achievement of a specified goal" (*American Heritage® Dictionary*, 2000). Thus, a school-family-community partnership is a collaborative relationship among the family, school, and community designed primarily to produce positive educational and social outcomes for children and youth, while being mutually beneficial to all parties involved.

Partnerships assume mutual responsibility and mutual respect. All partners share in the responsibilities and receive rewards based on the work they do together to enhance the academic and social growth of children. The resources of the various stakeholders are aligned so everyone is making a contribution to the common goal of learning. Partnerships recognize the importance and potential influence of all members who work with and invest in the education of the children—whose future, in turn, will affect the quality of life in the entire community.

While "family involvement" often has individuals thinking of a specific set of activities performed by a certain set of participants, "partnerships" open up the possibilities. Partnerships allow for a wider set of activities to be performed by a larger set of partners. Within partnerships, planners and organizers create rich, rewarding experiences instead of resorting to a typical set of activities. All partners leave behind the attitude that says "we have to do it, so let's just get it done" and take on the attitude of working together for the success of the students.

For partnership activities to be effective, they have to be meaningful to all parties and should be connected to broader school improvement goals. For example, if increasing the reading levels of all students is the number-one goal of your school, most activities need to be planned with reading achievement in mind. School-family-community partnership activities need to be an integral part of this effort, and should include sending communications home and conducting training sessions on how to help children learn to read. Family volunteering should focus on individualized reading tutoring. Evaluations need to include the amount of time family and community members read to (and talk with) children (at home, in the school, at the library, etc.) in English or in their home language.

When To Include Family and Community Members

No one would start a business or financial partnership without knowing all the partners, coming to an agreement on how the partnership would develop, and defining the responsibilities of all parties. Most people would never give their money to someone they did not know, or let that person make decisions about how their money would be used or for what purpose, without forming an agreement first. Most of us would not give our money or financial security to others, then expect to hear from them only when there is a major problem.

But parents are asked to do this every day. Parents send those who are most precious to them to school and leave their child's success in the hands of educators and administrators they may never meet. Often, parents' advice is not actively sought when planning how the children will be educated, with what programs the children will be involved, or how problems will be handled. Parents and school staff seldom know each other before the first concern arises when they often meet under less than ideal circumstances.

Ideas for Action

In order to ensure success of your school-family-community partnerships, family and community members should be involved with school staff and students from the beginning. Several ways that schools in the Northwest have included all parents and community members from the beginning, and included them in positive ways are provided below.

Welcome Conference: One school, committed to several parent/teacher/student conferences per year, created a policy in which the first conference is held before school starts. This conference is used to welcome the student and parents to the school/classroom, and is all about the child and planning his or her education. The teacher asks the parents to talk about their child (including the things they like best about the child), the strengths of their child (even if they don't seem to relate to education), the ways their child learns best, and what their child needs from the teacher in order to have a successful year. The teacher also asks the parents to talk about themselves in order to find out how the parents would like the teacher to work with them and the best ways the teacher and parents can communicate with each other. Finally, the teacher tells the parents and student about the classroom and teaching philosophies, and lets the parents know simple ways they can assist the teacher and work with their child to boost their educational success.

Communicate Early and Often: Another school included parents by establishing a routine of making phone calls to parents or sending personal notes home within the first month of school—before any issues arise. The teachers let the parents know what is happening in the class, and tell parents something positive about their child. By the second or third phone call or note, most parents welcome hearing from the teacher, and are convinced the teacher is sincerely interested in their child. By this time, most of the parents have willingly become the teacher's partner.

Home Visiting: One school uses home visits as a powerful strategy to understanding its students and connecting with students' families. Many children act differently at home than at school, and it helps to see children in their own homes to really get to know them well—to know their personalities, learning styles, interests, and strengths. Teachers have used children's interests that were discovered on home visits as the basis of curriculum topics through which to integrate content areas, and/or for selecting books to read.

For successful home visits, family members need to know that the visit is purely optional and must know the exact purpose of the visit. This school found solutions for the challenge of finding enough time for teachers to do home visits by conducting parent conferences during visits, and using staff development or faculty meeting time for visits. Most of the teachers doing these home visits are enthusiastic about the hugely positive impact on all aspects of teaching and learning in the classroom, and at home.

Help With Transitions: A fourth school formed partnerships by working with preschool educators and meeting the parents of incoming students. The school realized that entering a new environment was stressful for both the children and their parents. These transition times offered a good chance to inform parents about the changes taking place in their child's education and show parents how to help their child succeed during these potentially difficult times. (The same partnerships could be formed during other transition times: for instance, when a child changes schools, between elementary school and middle school, or between middle school and high school.)

School as Community Center: This last suggestion focuses on ways schools in the Northwest are more inclusive of community members and have become wonderful resources during out-of-school hours. Diverse areas within the schools (library, computer lab, gym, classrooms, etc.) are used to host public meetings and adult enrichment courses such as computers, arts and crafts, or fitness. For instance, one school partnered with health educators to host wellness classes for interested community members—right in their neighborhood.

Where Are You Now?

The first step in writing a partnership plan is to do a thorough study of the many issues that will affect the eventual success or failure of the partnership. Many hours should be invested in assessing these issues before any time, money, or effort is invested in actual activities. The partnership development team should start by:

- Reflecting on the attitudes and assumptions that school staff, students, family members, and community members hold about each other
- Realistically assessing who all the members of the school community are and what assets they bring to the table
- Physically walking through the school to determine what the environment says about what the school values and what the school climate is like
- Assessing current involvement activities and the results obtained from them

Attitudes and Assumptions

Research has shown that the extent to which schools encourage and facilitate families' participation in their children's education is a greater predictor of family involvement than family characteristics (U.S. Department of Education, 1997; Thorkildsen & Stein, 1998).

Beyond the vast demands on staff and teacher time to satisfy federal and state educational requirements, reaching out to families is made increasingly complex by the growing number and variety of families' ethnic, language, religious, economic, and social backgrounds. Thus, it is important to look at the attitudes and assumptions held by staff members when it comes to creating involvement programs or building partnerships. Educators who think only in terms of traditional families are likely to have a particularly hard time dealing with today's wide variety of family types and structures.

Attitudes often play a large part in the quality of and responses to family involvement and school-family-community partnership activities. Educators who have low expectations for "at-risk" children, or who believe that their parents don't care about them and don't want to be involved in their education, may contribute directly to a lack of parental involvement and to children's failure (Liontos, 1991). One study found that many educators believe that parents with low incomes do not value education highly and have little to contribute to the education of their children (National School Public Relations Association, 1988). Other research has found that some educators fail to give "at-risk" children work to take home, based on the assumption that their parents will be unable or unwilling to help (Hafner, Ingels, Schneider, Stevenson, & Owings, 1990).

When creating family involvement programs or building school-family-community partnerships, one of the major, unresolved issues is how to reach the families considered "hard to reach." Educators often label the parents of "at-risk" students as hard to reach and cite social or economic conditions as the cause. But what is meant by "hard to reach?" Often, when educators speak of disadvantaged or "hard-to-reach" families, they are referring to the families that are seldom seen by the school staff, but many have in mind such characteristics as:

- Minority background
- Low socioeconomic status
- Public housing occupancy
- Little formal education

- Single-parent households
- English language learners (ELL)

Family members who reflect such characteristics often state that one of the biggest problems they have in interactions with school staff is the assumptions made about their families and children. They would like school staff to ask before assuming, or at least to assume strengths rather than dysfunction. They would like to view the school staff as supportive and helpful rather than critical or antagonistic.

The following four activities give all team members a chance to look at their own assumptions, find ways to dispel preconceived notions and change attitudes, and figure out who the families really are.

Personal Reflection on Assumptions

Instructions: *This is a private activity, meant to be completed individually, and not shared with the group.* Team members should take about five minutes to thoughtfully and honestly consider the following questions to learn more about their personal assumptions and to reflect on the assumptions they feel are held by others. No writing of answers is required—just a thoughtful consideration of the assumptions held. At the end of the exercise, each person should move on to the Personal Action Steps/Statements (on the next page) and write out three to four statements of how he or she could change his or her own assumptions and have a positive impact on partnerships.

- When families are discussed at the school, what is said? Do people say "those families" don't care about their children or their education? Or are terms like resourceful and supportive used in conjunction with affirmation of the families' strengths and dedication to their children?

- When school staff members are discussed at home or in the community are they viewed individually (each with strengths and weaknesses) or lumped into a group? Is their work seen in the context of federal, state, and local mandates; or school and district policies and politics? Or are staff members held individually responsible for everything that happens?

- When you start planning family involvement/partnership activities what does the staff say? Do you hear more complaints (i.e., they don't come to conferences, don't check homework, or don't answer notes)? Or more compliments (i.e., they can always be counted on, or are a great resource)?

- When families discuss involvement in school activities and student learning, are easy excuses given for not being more involved (i.e., "I'm too busy," or "I'm not available during the day")? Or do they say things like, "I am involved … at home," or "I would be able to help if I knew where my skills and talents could best be used?"

- When a student has a problem, what is the assumed cause? Is it attributed to family situations like illness, or other issues at home? Is it attributed to school situations—the student is bored or the teaching and learning style do not match?

- When working with a student who has a problem, where and how are solutions sought? Is it assumed that the partners will be easy or difficult to work with? Do school staff, family members, and students start with a positive, problem-solving, solution-oriented approach, and enter into a partnership to develop a plan to solve the problem?

Personal Reflection on Assumptions

Instructions: *This is a private activity, meant to be completed individually. Share with the group only as you are comfortable.* Based on your reflections on the previous page, write out three to four Personal Action Steps/ Statements to help in your process of working more effectively with students, school staff, and family and community members. Start your statement with a phrase such as: "I will …."

Based on my Reflections … Personal Action Steps/Statements:

Examples:

- I will check myself before I make assumptions in regards to _____.
- I will call my child's math teacher tomorrow to make an appointment. I will ask questions rather than blame either the teacher or my child.
- I will send notes home weekly and in Spanish on Rosa's progress at school. They will contain more positive statements than negative ones. I will make suggestions for helping her at home.

1.

2.

3.

4.

When everyone has had a chance to write their Personal Action Steps/Statements, ask if anyone would like to volunteer to share one.

Group Activity on Assumptions

Instructions: Read each statement in the left column and check whether you feel this is or is not an assumption that hinders partnerships at your school. When done, discuss the assumptions the group considers most troublesome. Together, identify positive statements (as in the example in the first box on the right) that will dispel preconceived notions, change attitudes, and help facilitate partnerships. (If you identified an assumption you would like to address that is not listed, write it on a piece of chart pack paper to discuss when finished with the table below.)

Assumptions That Hinder Partnerships	School-Based Assumption?	What May Be the Reality?
Parents who don't attend school events don't care about their children's success in school.	☐ Yes ☐ No	Example: Even when unable to attend school events, most parents care a great deal about their child's success in school. Many parents find ways to support their child's education at home.
Parents who are illiterate or do not speak English can't help their children.	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Parents from different ethnic and racial groups don't understand the role they play in their children's education.	☐ Yes ☐ No	
It is up to parents to find out what is going on at school.	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Getting families involved takes a lot of time and energy, with the results not often corresponding to the effort.	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Children who are troublemakers often come from families that do not value education.	☐ Yes ☐ No	
It is all right for school staff to contact families only when a child is in trouble.	☐ Yes ☐ No	
The problems of "hard-to-reach" families and "at-risk" students are the fault of the families themselves.	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Teachers are expected to play the roles of parents too much in their jobs.	☐ Yes ☐ No	

Who Are the Members of Your School Community?

Now that you have addressed assumptions held by you and others, it is time to get to know the members of your school community. More important than just getting cursory knowledge, during this activity you will get a chance to know who they are as well as what they bring to the table (their assets and strengths). With an accurate picture of family and community members, you will be better able to plan activities as well as identify barriers you may come across.

Use your school improvement plan and district/school demographic information to find out the general make-up of your school community, including such aspects as:

- Percentage of single-parent homes
- Number of ESL/ELL families and what languages are spoken at home
- Rate of mobility
- Percentage of latchkey children

Instructions: Write the following statements on pieces of chart pack paper and post them around the room. Ask the team members to go to the chart pack paper with their role (family, school, youth, community) highlighted. Have the individuals discuss the statement and write the things they want the people in the room to know about their group. When finished with their poster, have them continue to another poster, read the things written by that group, and add any additional comments.

- A few things that the school should know about *families* in this community are:
- A few things that families and community members should know about the *school* are:
- A few things that families, the community, and school should know about the *youth* in this community are:
- A few things we should know about the *community* are:

After they have had a chance at each of the above posters, have them continue to the rest of the posters. Encourage discussion. Remind groups to proceed to the next poster when they have finished with the one where they are. When each of the poster statements have been answered, ask the group members to return to their seats and ask one person to read aloud the answers from one sheet … using the answers as discussion starters to increase understanding among team members and the groups they represent.

- If I only had access to _____, I could be a much better teacher (parent, administrator, student, etc.). (Fill in the blank)
- If only this community had _____, my job as a teacher (parent, administrator, student, etc.) would be much easier. (Fill in the blank)
- What are some the challenges facing families and school staff on a daily basis?

NOTE: For an additional activity to help you discover who the members of your school community are and what assets they could bring to the table, see Topic 4 of *Planning for Youth Success,* Mapping Community Assets for Youth Success (www.nwrel.org/partnerships/cloak/14-4-act.pdf).

School Climate and Environmental Considerations

Family and community members have prior experiences with schools that will have a positive or negative impact on the amount and type of involvement they wish to have. Educators must take this into consideration when planning and implementing partnerships in schools. Research suggests a connection between the school climate and the extent to which family and community members are involved (Comer & Haynes, 1992; Dauber & Epstein, 1993). They may only become involved if the school climate—the social and educational atmosphere of a school—is one that makes them feel welcomed, respected, trusted, heard, and needed.

When schools create a positive climate by reaching out to family and community members and providing structure for them to become involved, the result is effective partnerships that connect schools, families, and community members to help children succeed in school and in their future.

Just as you can learn about an individual by observing where he works or lives, you can learn much about a school's climate by looking at the school environment. You can learn many things about what is important and valued in the school by such things as the wording on signs, what is (and is not) displayed on the walls, the way the rooms are decorated, how people are greeted and helped, and whether or not individuals feel they are noticed.

Gretchen McKay, a staff writer for the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette News*, observed that: "There's a saying among school administrators that, if you want to feel the pulse of a particular building, one of the first things you should do is stick your head into the restroom." If you find clean floors and walls and adequate supplies, there's probably a high degree of school pride and a sense of involvement. But if you discover old graffiti scribbled on the walls and general uncleanliness, it shows how disconnected students (and staff) may feel from their school, how they regard their surroundings, and tells students and those who visit much about the climate and attitudes of the school (McKay, 2000).

Even though our environment can say a lot about us, it is often difficult for individuals to take a critical look at their own environment. They see the same things day in and day out, and can become immune to the statements their surroundings make. If possible, ask team members to take a critical look at another school—visiting their child's school or another school within the district during hours of operation to see what it would be like to walk into that school for the first time and try to find their way around. Have them consider the following questions:

- What are their impressions of this school?
- What does the condition of the school (both inside and out) say about how much people care about the school?
- Does the school seem to reflect what school staff feel about students and visitors?
- Based on what they have seen, what do they feel is important to the school?

This experience can be used to help team members look more objectively at their own school when they do the following activity.

Instructions for Environmental Checklist and Physical Walk-Through

Environmental Checklist Instructions: Take one to two minutes to answer the questions on the Environmental Checklist on Page 17. For all questions that you cannot answer, leave the line blank. Think about these questions when you are doing your physical walk-through and, during the walk-through, fill in any answers you may have missed.

Physical Walk-Through Instructions: Divide the partnership development team into smaller groups of two to three individuals. Each small team should contain no more than one family member, community member, school staff, or student so each team has a chance to view the school from multiple perspectives. Assign teams to examine two to three specific areas of the school, which may include the parking lot, entrances, main office, halls, classrooms, rooms specifically set up for family/ community members, restrooms, cafeteria, library, playground/recreation area/playing fields, and principal/ administrator's offices.

Use the **Record Sheet for Physical Walk-Through** on Page 18 to make comments regarding the areas you have been assigned. Questions on the top of the form will assist your critical observation, but make any additional comments you feel are important.

Take 15 minutes to complete the walk-through. Then have team members reconvene in the meeting room to share their experiences. Use the guiding questions below to assist with your discussion.

Guiding Questions Instructions: After your walk-through, have team members discuss the things that really stood out to them and the things that they may not have noticed before. Were there any surprises? After a general discussion of findings, have the large group answer the following questions.

Based on your findings,

- How welcoming is the school?
- What is different between what children see and what adults see?
- What do the displays say about what is important to the school or what the school values?
- Is this a place where parents want to send their children and where children want to come? Do they feel at home?
- What environmental changes would you make to your school to create a place where family and community members want to form a partnership?

NOTE: You may want to use some of what you found during the team's walk-through to prompt ideas for partnership activities during the action planning stage.

Environmental Checklist	Yes	No
Are there parking spaces reserved for family and community members?		
Are these spaces located near the front entrance of the school?		
Is the playground material and equipment safe and in good repair?		
Are fields maintained?		
Are tracks useful and in good repair?		
Does the exterior of the building look good?		
From wherever a person enters the building, can they easily find the main office?		
Is the tone of the signs in the school welcoming and inviting?		
Are signs written in the home languages of the students present in the school?		
Is student's work displayed on the walls within the hallways and in the classrooms?		
Are people greeted warmly when they entered the main office? (for instance, do staff seem pleased to see them? Do staff smile and use a pleasant tone of voice?)		
Are people greeted individually when they arrived? (for instance, do staff members say "hello" and introduce themselves? Do staff members call visitors by name? Do staff members use the primary language spoken at the home to say "hello"?)		
Do staff members assist in a timely manner?		
Can students and family members see themselves represented in the books, pictures, and materials used in the classrooms?		
Are the school and the classrooms accessible to all students and family members (even those with disabilities)?		
Are restrooms clean and well lighted?		
Are soap dispensers filled and paper supplies adequate?		
Are there doors on the stalls in the restrooms?		
Are the tables and benches in the cafeteria clean and in good repair?		
Are floors in the cafeteria kept clean?		
Is the library well-stocked with reading materials?		
Is the library an inviting place that makes students want to come in and read?		
Are family and community members allowed to access resources within the library (check out books, use computers)?		
Is there a table for meetings in the principal's office?		
Are the main office and the principal's office all "business" or are they student/family friendly?		
Does the principal's office reveal a personal side of the principal?		
Does the school environment reflect how the staff feel about the students?		
Is there a room set up specifically for family and community members?		
Are there adult tables and chairs in the family room?		
Is there a telephone in the family room?		
Is there a place to store valuables and personal items in the family room?		
Does the family room reflect how the school feels about parents?		
Do family and community members feel welcome at the school?		

Record Sheet for Physical Walk-Through

Instructions: On the line provided, write in the area(s) of the school you have been assigned. In the space provided, write your observations of the area and use the following questions to help direct your thoughts.

- What is the first thing you see when you enter this area?
- What is the condition of the things you see?
- Are written items in the home languages of the student body?
- Does the area reflect positively on how school staff feel about students and their families?
- What does this area say about what is important to the school or what the school values?

Area of the School: _____

Area of the School: _____

Area of the School: _____

Assessment of Current Activities

Before moving on to create your new plan, it is good to look at what you have been doing and what results you are receiving from these activities.

Instructions: In the first row, list current family involvement or partnership activities that the school is doing. In the boxes below the activity, answer the questions on the left to show how the school has been affected by the identified activity (as in the example).

Current family involvement or partnership activities		Example: Families volunteering in the classrooms	1.	2.	3.	4.
Impact Indicators	Does this activity connect to student learning goals or the school improvement goals/outcomes? How?	By itself, this activity does not, but it gives the teachers more time to work on school improvement goals.				
	How do you measure the success of this activity?	We count the number of volunteers and the hours volunteered.				
	What have been the benefits and outcomes of this activity? How have you measured these?	We always have a few parents who do a lot of volunteering. They are very helpful.				
	What have been the challenges/weaknesses of this activity? What's not working as you would like? What would you change?	The same parents volunteer to do the work all the time. I would like to see more and varied parents (dads, minority parents, single parents) in our school. Number of volunteer hours is decreasing.				

What Will It Look Like When We Get There?

School-family-community partnerships look different at different schools and at different grade levels because the needs and wants of students change dramatically over time. As the children grow and develop and the school structure and family dynamics change, the methods and expectations of partnerships change and evolve.

During the preschool and elementary school years, the structures of the schools and families and the needs of the children generally support the typical family involvement activities with fairly good results. As students enter middle school and high school, patterns of communication between the families and the school change. Reasons are complex, including accommodating multiple teachers and recognizing the increased need among young people to develop a sense of self that is separate from their families. Other issues that make partnerships different as youth make the transition to higher grades include larger school buildings located farther from home and more complicated schedules.

Middle and high school years are difficult for young people. This is a stage filled with growing peer pressure, dramatic physical changes, and an awakening need for more independence. The youth begin to weigh choices and consequences, make more decisions on their own, learn from their mistakes, and establish their own set of values to guide their decisions and actions. They begin seeking help from peers rather than their parents. Teens sometimes feel embarrassed when parents are at their school, and may resent their parents' presence at school when the students are with friends.

Parents' roles also change. They try to find a balance between "letting go" and "being there" for their children. Parents continue to offer support and love, but they begin stepping back a little in their children's lives in order to allow their children to develop their self-identity and to show respect for their growing independence. Parents begin to let adolescents make their own choices and take responsibility for their actions and decisions.

Attitudes and expectations of school staff about acceptable forms of family involvement may also change. Many parent-student activities that were acceptable in elementary school, such as registering for classes, attending school events, or walking to and from school, may be seen as student-only events by the time students reach middle and high school. Teachers and administrators often encourage parents and students to let the youth advocate for themselves and find solutions to their own problems.

Voices of Students

Student focus groups were conducted during spring 2002 to gather the thoughts and opinions of a few young people in regards to family involvement. Participants represented a diverse group of elementary, middle, and high school students from the Portland metropolitan area.

Students at all grade levels expressed interest in having their families involved in their education, often reflecting the developmental information given in the preceding paragraphs. Elementary school students wanted their parents directly involved with them in the classroom, school, or at school-sanctioned activities. High school students said they wanted parents involved and realized that their schools would be greatly lacking if not for parent support and participation, but the youth wanted their parents involved apart from the student's daily activities. Middle school students were the "fuzzy, in-between group" with some wanting direct involvement while others were searching for independence.

Being embarrassed by parents was a main issue for all age levels, and students were embarrassed by similar things. Boys especially did not want to be called by pet names or kissed in front of their peers. Girls were extremely sensitive if their mothers came to school in unacceptable fashions or with inappropriate hair or makeup. All groups said they did not want their parents sharing the student's funny baby stories with their teachers or peers.

One very important issue for students that has major implications for educators at all grade levels: *Students don't want their parents involved in school only when there is a problem.* Students want parents and teachers to tell each other about the good things done at home and at school. Students in all focus groups said they wanted their parents to enlighten teachers about what their child is like outside the classroom and wanted teachers to tell their parents about the strengths and success students demonstrate in the classroom.

One middle school student summed up the challenges and expectations of middle and high school students very well. She said, "No, I don't want my parents to come and see me at my school. When they are here, I can't do what I want or kick it with who I want to be with. If they are not here, I can be my own person. When they are here, they embarrass me. But at the same time, I am grateful and thankful when my parents do come to the school because some kids don't have parents that are there and show that they are concerned. When my parents are at the school it shows that it [education] really matters and they get to know my teachers and what I am doing. I guess it is OK if my parents are there … to a point."

The following are summaries of the thoughts and opinions of the majority of the students who participated in the focus groups. Based on the content of the question, not all questions were directed to each focus group.

1. How are your parents involved in your education?

- Elementary school students responded that their parents drop them off and pick them up at school. They added that their parents make them do their homework and limit the amount of TV they watch.
- Middle school students responded that parents are involved by making sure they get their homework done.
- High school students reported that their parents are pretty hands-off and act more as a resource for them. Many added that their parents provide financial assistance and chaperone school events when necessary.

2. When I say "family involvement," what does that mean to you? How would you explain it?

- Elementary school students thought that family involvement means doing things at school, such as participating in school activities, making donations, being a member of the PTA, helping with book sales, and chaperoning field trips.
- Middle school students thought that involvement means communicating with their parents about classes and things that are happening at school, chaperoning field trips, talking to teachers when the students are "good" or "bad," and doing stuff with their family.
- High school students responded that parent involvement means many different things, because everyone has a different style of parenting. But the bottom line is that parents should be aware of what's happening in their child's life.

3. Do you want your parent/guardian to come to your school?

- Elementary school students were mixed in their responses. When they are behaving well they want their parents to visit, and when they are misbehaving, they don't!

- Middle school students reported that they do not want their parents to come to their school because their parents will embarrass them. They further said that they couldn't do what they wanted or "kick it" when their parents were around. They said, "If they are not here, I can be my own person."
- High school students reported that their parents do many things around their schools. They didn't really mind if their parents came to their schools, but didn't want them to do things directly with them.

4. What would you like your parent/guardian to do at your school?

- Elementary school students want their parents to eat lunch with them, bring treats to their class, and help them learn. When asked how they feel when parents visit their school, the majority felt happy and excited. Many wanted their dads to come to their school.
- Middle school students reported that they would not like it if their parents were at their school, and definitely not doing anything directly with them. They suggested parents could volunteer in the office, talk to teachers, help with classwork, and attend school performances or games.
- High school students reported that they did not want their parents doing anything directly with them at their school. The majority didn't want them around their friends and checking up on them.

5. What might keep you from wanting your parents at your school?

- Elementary school students did not want their parents coming to school, embarrassing them by using their nicknames, yelling at them, disciplining them, or making fun of them. All were very specific that they did not want these things to happen in front of friends.
- Middle school students reported that they did not want their parents coming to school looking silly. They wanted their moms to come looking their best. Students also reported that they did not want to embarrass their parents by misbehaving when their parents were at their school.

6. Is there anything that a parent could share with your teacher that would make school better for you?

- Elementary school students said their parents could tell them they were good kids and that they liked school.
- Middle school students responded that a parent could report that they work better alone. Others agreed, adding that they talked too much when working in groups and were able to concentrate better when they worked alone.
- High school students' comments varied, with the majority stating that their parents could tell their teachers things that could help them learn.

7. What things do your parents do at home that encourage you and help you learn?

- Elementary school students commented that they like their parents to help them with their schoolwork.
- Middle school students reported that their parents make them turn off the TV and study. The students liked the amount of support they received at home.

8. How do you think teachers/administrators feel about your parents/family being involved in your education?

- Middle school students reported they thought educators liked it.
- High school students think some educators do not like it when parents volunteer. They said there were a lot of people at their schools who were not very friendly or helpful.

In summary, students who participated in the focus groups were very vocal about what they wanted and needed from their parents. Elementary school children wanted parents to come to school to do more fun things. They identified that it was important for their parents to drop them off and pick them up at school as well as help them with their schoolwork. One thing that really stood out among the elementary students was their desire to have their fathers involved. Many students expressed a desire to have their "Dads" coming to their school more often.

Middle school students had a different opinion about family involvement. When asked if they wanted their parents to come to their school, they responded with a resounding NO! Their greatest concern was that they didn't want to be embarrassed by their parents nor did they want their parents to do "things" with or around their friends. But after answering a few more questions, they agreed that having their parents involved was important and beneficial to them.

High school students spoke very matter-of-factly about what they needed and wanted from their parents—speaking as if the relationship were more like a business arrangement. They knew that their parents were there for them, but indicated that it was time for them to stand on their own two feet and navigate their own academic and personal success. Students were not dependent on the approval of their parents like the students in the lower grades, but rather asked for guidance and direction only when necessary.

The answers received during the focus groups only represent a small group of students from the Northwest, but from the information obtained you can tell that much can be gained from students. Many educators have expressed concerns about what involvement should look like at their school. Listening to the voices of students can help answer that question. Consider developing and administering a similar survey to determine the needs and desires of your students in relation to family involvement.

In addition to listening to student voices, the next activity can help you look at your own needs and circumstances and help you form a vision of what school-family-community partnerships should look like within your school.

Developing Your Own Clear Vision

Part of every great plan is to have a vision of what it will look like when the job is done.

- Cookbooks include pictures of the prepared dishes
- Architects create plans, then make scale models
- Clothing designers draw sketches

Likewise, there needs to be a clear vision of what it will look like when effective school-family-community partnerships are formed within your classroom, school, or program.

A vision statement answers the questions, "What will success look like?" and "What would you like to accomplish in the future?" It is a description in words that conjures up a similar picture for each team member of the results of their work together. A vision statement is a *guiding image* that is consistent with the partnership's values. It should be realistic and credible, well articulated and easily understood, appropriate, ambitious, and responsive to change.

You will never be greater than the vision that guides you.

The vision statement should require the members of the partnership team to stretch their expectations, aspirations, and performance. It should orient the team's energies and serve as a guide to action. In short, a vision should challenge and inspire the team to achieve its mission. It is the pursuit of this shared image of success that really motivates people to work together.

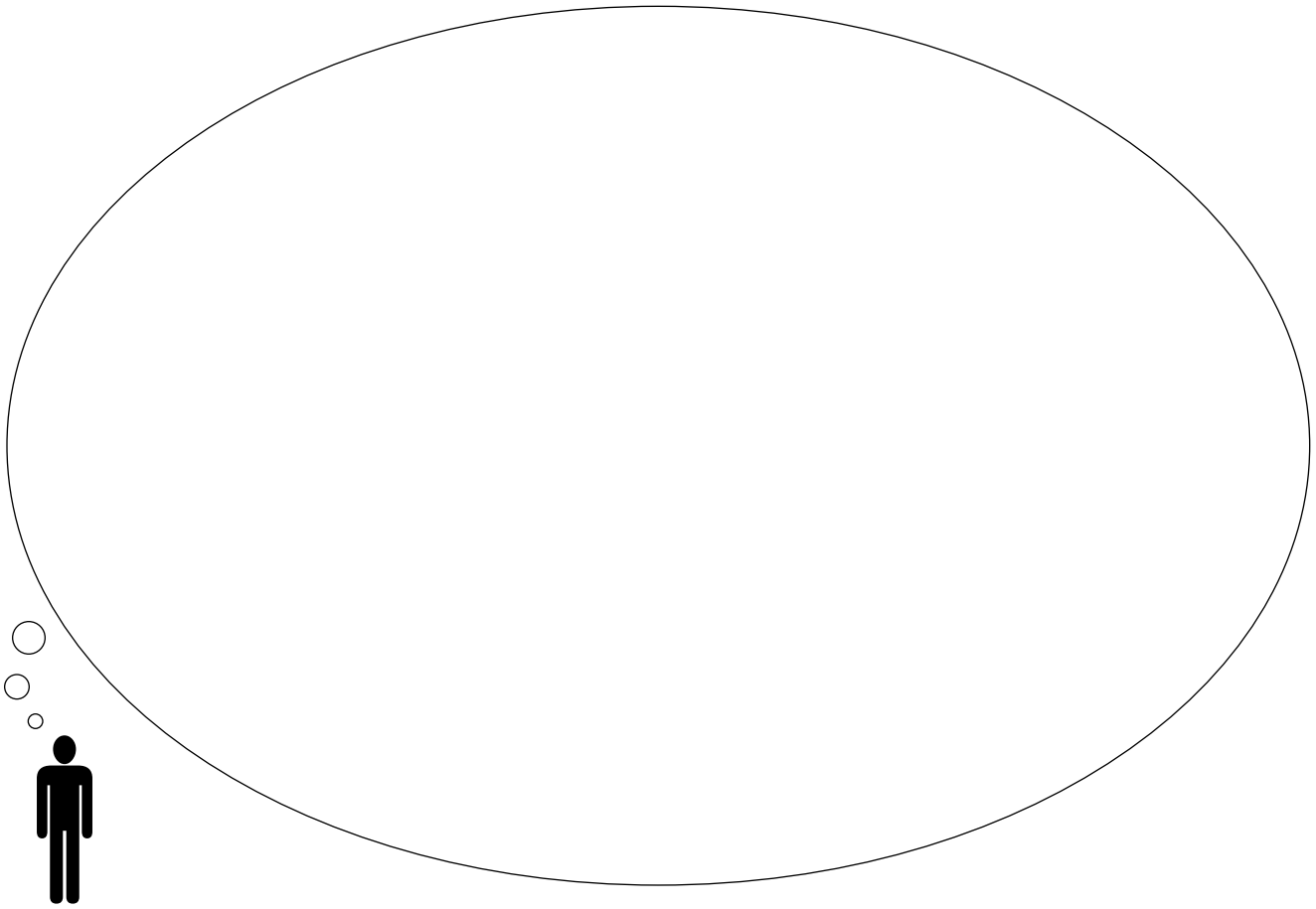
Members of a partnership team may work hard but, without having a vision statement formally in place, they may not be as creative and focused in finding new and better ways to work together. Partnership teams, with their members actively looking for ways to achieve their vision, have a powerful advantage over teams that operate without a vision. It's the schools with a clear vision and plans to develop that vision that build effective, meaningful partnerships. The following activity was designed to assist your partnership team in defining its own vision.

Instructions: Individually … envision the resources, time, and dedicated partners planning with you on developing school-family-community partnerships!

- What is happening as a result of positive school-family-community partnerships?
- How has your school changed?
- What impact is your partnership having on academic achievement?
- What does success look like?

Be creative—stretch your minds and experiment with different ways of thinking about what success means to you.

In the space provided, draw or write your vision (a picture of success) of what you would like to accomplish in your school in the future.



After members have had ample time to complete their vision, have all the members share their pictures of success with each other. One person should facilitate the discussion and help the others discuss what they mean and what they hope for. Look for areas of agreement, as well as different ideas that emerge. The goal is to find language and imagery that your team members can relate to as their vision for success.

Talk about and write down the values that are shared in pursuing that vision. Different ideas need not create problems. People can spur each other on to more daring and valuable dreams and visions. Try to draft a vision statement based on the group's discussion and revise it until you have something that members can agree on and that everyone can share with enthusiasm.

Example: *We, the staff, students, parents, and community members of Central Valley High School join together to form a partnership committed to high standards and dedicated to continuous improvement. We act as one—planning and implementing a comprehensive school-family-community partnership aimed at improving the academic achievement and social success of all our children.*

When complete, write your partnership's vision statement in section three of the action plan on Page 31.

The *Partnerships by Design* Action Plan

In the background section of this booklet, seven questions regarding school-family-community partnerships were outlined. These questions included goals of:

- Producing meaningful involvement
- Creating effective school-family-community partnerships
- Including a wide variety of participants
- Showing how activities affect student achievement
- Working more closely with partners in the success of the school
- Advertising successes
- Including partners in the problem-solving and decisionmaking processes of the school

In order to help partnership activities fulfill these great expectations, the *Partnerships by Design* Action Plan draws upon the "backward design" concept presented by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe in their 1998 book *Understanding by Design*. Their plan has three major steps:

1. Identify desired results
2. Determine acceptable evidence
3. Plan activities

For partnership activities to be most effective, consider following these steps in this order. Planning activities, without careful consideration of the goals and outcomes, may or may not involve more family and community members, enhance the school-family-community partnership, and help reach the school improvement goal of increasing student achievement. By designing your evaluation tools to measure attainment of goals and aligning your activities to target specific outcomes, you increase your chances for success.

Other components of the *Partnerships by Design* action plan include:

4. Barrier identification and removal
5. Partners' roles and responsibilities

Where Do You Want To Go?

Goals and Outcomes

Family involvement programs and/or school-family-community partnerships are sometimes not successful in achieving the outcomes they want because they neglect to define—from the beginning—what goals they want to meet. They don't set realistic, measurable goals from the outset. They just dive into planning activities in the hopes of increasing their family involvement, without setting up any goals other than increasing the numbers of family members involved.

Step one in the *Partnerships By Design* action plan is to identify desired results. The partnership development team needs to set goals for what the partnership hopes to do. A goal is an optimistic view of what could be and shows "where you want to go." Goals are statements of expected results that are specified in general measurable terms. Goals should be broad enough to encompass the need, problem, or concern, but specific enough to focus on the issue. A good goal statement is clearly written and contains a demand for action and planning that is easily measured. Goals should be simple statements that are both short- and long-term. Details on how to reach these goals can be included.

If you don't set goals and then try to reach them, it's guaranteed that your partnership activities will stay right where they are today.

Goals need to be realistic and do-able, and the resulting objectives need to be specific and easily measured. They need to answer the following questions:

- What will change as a result of your partnerships?
- The changes will happen for whom?
- By how much?
- By when?
- By what method will the goal be measured?

Without establishing goals, the partnerships could:

- Lack the time and resources needed to turn goals into reality
- Lack the ability to respond to the changing needs of the school community
- Lack a definite direction and the ability to stay on course.

How Are You Going To Know When You Are There?

Research strongly supports family involvement in the education of their children and indicates that it is a key factor in children's success at school. Children whose families are more involved do better in terms of grades (grade point average and test scores), attendance, attitudes toward school and learning, behavior (increased motivation and self-esteem), and graduation rates (Clark, 1993; Griffith, 1996; Thorkildsen & Stein, 1998).

Evaluation of Partnership Efforts

Just as students are regularly evaluated to determine what they have learned and adjustments made accordingly, so too must school staff evaluate the impact of their partnership efforts. Schools and programs understand that family involvement increases student achievement, but they are often unable to establish the link between their partnership efforts and the impact these efforts have on teaching and learning and on student achievement. Schools are also unable to establish a connection between activities and overall school improvement goals or to show how the success of an event contributed to increased student achievement.

Step two is to determine acceptable evidence. You need to be able to answer the questions: How are you going to know you have achieved your goals? How are the goals going to be measured? How will you share and promote your success?

Determining acceptable evidence includes:

- Describing the evidence you will need to show that you are reaching your goals
- Planning the types of tools you will use along the way to evaluate the effectiveness of the activities and see if you are meeting your goals, and improve your plans and activities
- Describing how all partners will participate in these assessments
- Formulating a process to continuously improve practices
- Creating plans for advertising your successes to family and community members

"Traditionally, educators count the number of parents at PTA meetings and dollars earned at bake sales and come up with an equation for parent involvement."

—Tellin' Stories Project Action Research Group, 2000, p. 10

Usually, partnership efforts are only evaluated by the number of volunteer hours that family and community members provide or the number of family members who attend school events (such as parent-teacher conferences, back-to-school nights, and other school-sanctioned events). Accurate reporting does include these numbers, but it should also show how partnership efforts are linked to overall school improvement goals as well as assess the strengths and weaknesses of your efforts.

All partners should be involved in the evaluation process so everyone is clear on what is working, what is not working, and how to improve on the plan.

In order to evaluate effectiveness in terms of partnerships you will need to survey a random sample of the stakeholders. Send a few surveys or questions to family members, teachers, students, community members, and other partners. Be prepared to ask the hard questions, such as: "Are you happy?" "Do you feel welcome?" "What else would you like to see happen?" Use the information gathered from the random sample when planning future family involvement activities. Surveys should be done after each activity in order to gather and utilize the feedback from participants to create future activities that will enrich the school and community.

For an evaluation exercise, you can create a survey/evaluation tool. On Page 32 is a sample survey and on Page 33 are sample questions that you may want to include in a survey you develop. The results of a survey like this can be used to show how partnership efforts are connected to school improvement goals and to make changes and improve plans for years to come.

How Are You Going To Get There?

Plan Activities

A partnership plan should identify actions to help the partnership meet its planned goals. Step three is planning activities. What activities are you going to plan to get you there? What are you willing to do to get there? How are you going to go about getting what you want and need? How do you move forward? How does the activity link to goals? How will the activity provide evidence of meeting goals?

Activity plans include:

- The roles and responsibilities of school staff and family and community members. List the things they need to do in order to reach goals and fulfill the vision.
- A list of resources you will need.
- A timeline to plan the sequence of events and activities. Consider planning for multiple years, including detailed descriptions of current year activities, with outlines for subsequent years.

The six National Standards for School-Family-Community Partnerships outlined in the table below might suggest areas for activities. These National Standards (entitled the National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs), developed by the National PTA in cooperation with the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education (NCPIE), were built upon the six types of parent involvement identified by the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University (National PTA, 1998).

National Standards for School-Family-Community Partnerships

Standard I: Communicating
Communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful.

Standard II: Parenting
Parenting skills are promoted and supported.

Standard III: Student Learning
Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.

Standard IV: Volunteering
Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought.

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

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

Activities can always be undertaken in a way that is not effective and does not affect any program goals. When planning activities for your partnership, remember to align them with your partnership goals, include many opportunities for family members to see that what they are already doing has direct impact on their children's success, and contain many options for showing the reciprocal nature of partnerships.

Action Plan Instructions:

Step 1. Locate your school's mission and goals in your School Improvement Plan, and write them in the space provided.

Step 2. Answer the question: "Did your school engage family and community members in writing this mission and setting these goals?"

Step 3. If you have not already done so, write in the vision statement for your school-family-community partnership from the activity on Pages 24–25.

Step 4. Recording on a chart pack piece of paper, brainstorm goals and outcomes until the team decides on two or three specific goals for your school-family-community partnership that are most important to address. Write these in the boxes provided. Refer to Pages 26–27 for things to consider. Make sure the goals are realistic and measurable, and that the statement addresses the questions on Page 27.

Step 5. Recording on a chart pack piece of paper, discuss ways to determine whether your partnership activities are meeting the specific goals. Write the acceptable evidence in the boxes provided. Refer to Pages 27–28 for things to consider. On a separate piece of paper (and done at a later date if more convenient), make sure to include information on the types of tools you will use, a description of how all partners will participate in the evaluation, a process of using the results to improve practices, and a plan to advertise your success.

Step 6. Recording on a chart pack piece of paper, brainstorm optional activities for meeting these goals. For potential ideas, use information gained during the Physical Walk-through (activity on Pages 15–18) and the Needs Assessment activity (on Pages 34–36) to help determine the activities that you would prefer to plan at this time. Write the activities in the boxes provided. Refer to Page 29 for things to consider. Make sure to include a list of needed resources and a timeline for events.

Step 7. Describe the role that partners will play in meeting the specified goal. Define who will participate in developing these partnership activities and how they will implement the action plan. For thoughts and ideas on potential roles, review the information and worksheets provided on Pages 42–46.

Step 8. Answer the question: "Are all partners united on the school-family-community partnership vision and goals?"

NOTE: If you begin to get stuck on barriers when writing your action plan, refer to the information, ideas for action, and worksheet on Pages 37–41 to plan ways to effectively navigate the barriers you come up against.

Action Plan

Instructions: See detailed instructions on Page 30.

1. What are your school's mission and goals?

2. Did your school engage family and community members in writing this mission and setting these goals? ☐ Yes ☐ No

3. What is your school-family-community partnerships vision statement?

4. What are your school-family-community partnership goals?	5. What is acceptable evidence of achieving these goals?	6. What activities will you plan to reach your goals?	7. What role will partners play in helping meet this goal?

8. Are all partners united on the school-family-community partnership vision and goals? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Sample Feedback Survey on School-Family-Community Partnership Activities

Instructions: Please complete the following questions based on your involvement with the school-family-community partnership activity that has taken place at our school.

Role Group: (i.e., teachers, administrator, parent, student, community member) _____

Activity Attended/Date: _____

1. Are you familiar with our "school improvement goals"? ☐ Yes ☐ No

2. Was this activity beneficial to you and your family? ☐ Yes ☐ No

3. Do you think this activity has increased or affected family and community partnerships at our school? ☐ Yes ☐ No

   If yes, how? _____

   _____

4. What part of this activity did you enjoy the most? Why? _____

   _____

   _____

5. Were you involved in the planning process? ☐ Yes ☐ No

   If so, how? _____

6. Would you be interested in joining the planning committee to help plan future family involvement activities? ☐ Yes ☐ No

   If yes, please provide your name and contact information and someone will contact you to help plan the next event.

   _____

7. What other family involvement events/activities would you like to see take place at your school?

   _____

8. Overall, how do you feel about your school and the way it is working to form school-family-community partnerships?

   _____

9. In general, do you feel welcome at the school? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Additional Questions To Use When Evaluating Partnerships Efforts

Are the goals and objectives, in terms of involving families and community members in the school improvement goals, being met?

How are parents and community members contributing to decisions about student learning?

Are school events, workshops, or training sessions well attended by both school staff and families? Why or why not? (What are we going to do about the "why nots"?)

In what ways have language and culture reflective of the community been integrated into the school, events, and curriculum?

How are community resources used? How is a parent liaison with strong ties to the community engaged?

Is the school warm and inviting? Is there a family center?

Are written materials provided in the home languages of the students at the school? Are interpreters readily available?

How are people reacting to communications efforts? Are family and community members asked for ways to improve communication? How is some or all of their advice incorporated as the school-family-community partnership plan is refined? Are suggestions made by family and community members shared with school staff?

How are successes and challenges shared with the school community?

Needs Assessment

Schools often ask parents to do activities that some parents feel are mundane and a poor use of their time and skills. These activities include such things as serving as volunteers; making copies and cutting paper; sending out mailings; acting as chaperones; and working on fund-raising drives. In addition, these activities are often extraneous to the primary school improvement goal, but nonetheless important. Schools and educators still want and need these things because, with assistance on these items, it is possible for school staff to concentrate fully on the goals of meeting the students' educational needs.

When you think only in terms of these activities being "parent involvement" activities and getting parents to perform them, you are limiting the number of individuals who can do these activities.

Here is where the potential of partnerships really opens things up. When you think of a school-family-community partnership as a collaborative relationship between the family, school, and community that is mutually beneficial to all parties involved, you have more people from which to draw, and a new way to draw them in!

In this activity, we will be encouraging you to look at other resources for getting these tasks done and providing a tool to help you do this. First, you will create a list of needs. Then you will target your requests and make potential benefits known. Don't limit yourself to thinking of parent volunteers. Instead, think first of the need, then consider the potential partners who may be able to meet this need and see what benefits these partners could obtain by providing this service to the school.

For instance, if yard care and lawn maintenance is a need of the school, ask family and community members who own or work for a landscaping company if they would donate some time and expertise as an in-kind contribution/donation to the school. Remind the landscapers they could use their donation as a tax write-off! If the school is located in a large city, there may be enough companies within the district to have the companies only donate time one or two times per year. Another possibility is to get retirees who enjoy yard work and gardening (and who may no longer have a yard of their own) to donate time to beautifying the school grounds. One other option would be to partner with local stores that cater to the needs of youth (clothing stores, department stores, music stores) and ask for donations of gift certificates for the school. You can trade these certificates (in lieu of cash) to young people (or families) who do yard work to earn extra money to buy the things they want and need.

Because of the reciprocal nature of partnerships, we have included a form to assess the needs and wants of the community and family members and how the school may be able to meet these needs. On the back side of the school's needs assessment form list the needs of the community and family members, list how the school can help fulfill these needs, and list who else in the community can help provide resources to meet this need and how they can help.

Needs Assessment for the School

Instructions: In the column to the left, identify your need. (Include things that you want or hope to achieve as well.) In the center column, identify who can help you meet this need. In the right column, identify the benefit for the partner who can help meet this need.

For the **School** … Need?	Who can you ask?	What is the benefit to them?
Lawn Care/Yard Maintenance	Companies that already do this work	Tax write-off

For Classroom **Teachers** … Need?	Who can you ask?	What is the benefit to them?
Make copies, cut shapes, etc.	Students in high school business classes	Volunteer work on résumé

For **Students** … Need?	Who can you ask?	What is the benefit to them?
Reading tutors	Retired teachers	Lets them work with students again

Needs Assessment for Community and Family Members

Instructions: In the column to the left, identify the need. (Include things that you want or hope to achieve as well.) In the center column, identify how the school can help meet this need. In the right column, identify the potential partners (outside the school) who may also be able to assist in meeting this need and how.

For the **Community** … Need?	How can the school help meet this need?	Who else can assist in meeting this need? How?
A place to hold community activities in the evening	The school can stay open in the evenings to host these activities	Individuals within the parks and recreation department can help lead activities and provide resources

For **Family Members** … Need?	How can the school help meet this need?	Who else can assist in meeting this need?
ESL classes held in their neighborhood	The school can stay open in the evenings to host these classes	Professors from the community college can provide instruction for the classes

Barriers to School-Family-Community Partnerships

When talking about school-family-community partnerships, many partners focus on the barriers that have come up in their path and have blocked the way to creating effective and meaningful partnerships. But, instead of looking at barriers as obstacles that keep you from reaching your goals, the partnership team needs to look at them in a new way.

Sprinters take off from the blocks and run straight ahead, trying to reach the finish line before the other runners. Any obstacle that gets in their way will keep them from reaching their goal in a timely manner and, at times, may keep them from finishing the race. Hurdlers, on the other hand, know that there will be several obstacles placed between them and their goal. They look at these obstacles as a way to sharpen their techniques and increase their skills. They plan ahead as to how to overcome these obstacles in a way that will enhance their ability to reach their goal.

Part of putting together a workable partnership plan is to forewarn of possible "hurdles" along the way and formulate responses to them. By doing this, members of the partnership team will become more like hurdlers and will plan how to successfully navigate the obstacles in their path. With just a little foresight and a plan of action, you will have an organized and effective response that can eliminate many problems and unforeseen events.

Hurdles and Ideas for Action

Even though some obstacles are family based and some are school based, schools can play a major role in breaking the practical and psychological barriers that have been keeping family and community members away. Research has shown that the extent to which schools encourage and facilitate participation is a greater predictor of involvement than family characteristics such as the parent's education, socioeconomic, and marital status (Thorkildsen & Stein, 1998; U.S. Department of Education, 1997). Research also has shown that involvement is higher when schools welcome parents and make it easy for them to be involved (Nord, Brimhall, & West, 1997).

Schools can take the first steps toward building strong relationships by creating a welcoming school environment, regularly sharing information in the languages spoken by its families, taking suggestions seriously, and continuously working toward positive relationships.

The following is a list of some frequently identified barriers to effective partnerships including a few ideas for action in overcoming these hurdles.

Lack of Time: (Is felt by all partners.) Educators have limited time both at school, and in their personal life where they may be parents themselves. Families often have scheduling difficulties and conflicting demands on their time. Schools often organize events for staff convenience, with activities scheduled at times that may be inconvenient for working parents.

Actions:

- Provide flexible hours to participate or schedule multiple performances
- Videotape school performances and send tapes home with students for parents to view

Transportation: Many parents have transportation issues (no working car of their own, no access to public transportation, or public transportation is inconvenient) that result in their inability to attend school functions.

Actions:

- Provide transportation on school bus, or provide access to public transportation
- Help parents set up carpools
- Meet at convenient locations for parents, such as community centers, apartment buildings, places of worship, or other sites off school grounds

Child care: Lack of any child care or appropriate, affordable child care prevents family and community members from participating in programs held at school.

Actions:

- Set aside a room in the school in which to provide child care during events
- Recruit staff and student volunteers for child care
- Allow younger children to come to school and provide supervised activities for them

Language Barriers: Non–English speaking families who receive only English communications from the school may feel that the school does not respect or value their heritage. Written communications are not always appropriate for all families. When educators and family members do not speak the same language, communications will be hindered, and participation and understanding may be limited.

Actions:

- Have printed materials translated into home languages
- Have interpreters available at all events
- Conduct family meetings in the home languages of the students enrolled in your school, with English translations available

School practices that do not accommodate or fail to support the cultural diversity of the families served: Families with non-majority cultural and linguistic backgrounds may feel alienated from schools that do not value diversity. Those who do speak English but have little education may have difficulty communicating with schools because their life experiences and perspectives are different from those of teachers.

Actions:

- Work to increase everyone's awareness of and sensitivity to other cultures' values, attitudes, manners, and views of the school community
- Know the holidays and observances of all groups in the school
- Work with a knowledgeable, appropriate representative of the community to get to know the diverse cultures of the community

Negative experiences with schools: Parents whose own school experiences were unsuccessful or stressful may be uncomfortable in interactions at their child's school, and may be reluctant to return to school as parents. Some parents have a limited education and aren't sure they have anything of value to contribute. Other parents feel underutilized, especially in decisions affecting the academic life of the school.

Actions:

- Extend a personal welcome to parents who appear to be withdrawn or uncomfortable
- Learn about their interests and abilities; and actively seek opportunities to use their experiences and talents for the benefit of the school

Parents don't know what to do or how to contribute: Many parents are unsure about how to help their children learn. Parents don't know what schools need, or don't understand how the system works. At times, educators fail to ask parents to help, and sometimes unintentionally discourage participation.

Actions:

- Give parents information or materials they can use at home to support their children's learning.
- Make needs known. Make direct contact. Personally invite participation.
- Keep community informed about what is happening and provide a variety of opportunities for all community members to participate.
- Communicate activities and needs in varied ways (direct mail, nonprint media).

The primacy of basic needs and lack of a supportive environment: Many parents without adequate resources are simply overwhelmed. Some families suffer extreme economic stress; addressing their own food, clothing, and shelter needs takes precedence over involvement in their children's school.

Actions:

- Provide information to help parents secure the services they need
- Develop a directory of services such as social service agencies, medical clinics, food pantries, substance abuse counseling, legal services, literacy courses, and tutoring in English as a second language (ESL)
- Allow organizations to use the school building during out-of-school hours as a hub for providing services and resources to the community

Lack of educator training: Many educators lack training in how to work with families. Few teacher preparation programs address techniques for communicating with families, and many educators and other school staff do not know how to involve parents in children's learning.

Actions:

- Offer teachers formal training on collaborating with family members, recruiting and working with the community, and understanding today's busy lifestyles
- Create inservice training opportunities on subjects such as the benefits of and barriers to school-family-community partnerships; techniques for improving communication between home and school, and between school and the community; and ways schools and teachers can meet families' social, educational, and social service needs
- Urge all school staff to attend inservice training on school-family-community partnerships

Schools are unresponsive or unwelcoming: Parents may feel they are not welcome in the school. Some parents may have gotten the message that "parents need not interfere."

Actions:

- Provide tangible evidence that involvement is welcome
- Make sure parents know they are welcome to drop in at school during the day
- Post welcome signs in all languages spoken at the school
- Show an interest and get involved in the community, as well

Use this list of barriers and ideas for action to help you fill in the chart on the next page. List the possible barriers that are in your community and formulate specific responses to them. Plan how to successfully navigate the obstacles in your path and come up with an organized and effective response.

Hurdles and Ideas for Action!

Instructions: Identify obstacles that may inhibit partnership development in your school community (or may keep it from becoming meaningful and effective) and define a plan of action that will help you navigate the hurdles in your way.

What hurdles may be in your way?	How will you navigate them?	Who will help you?	What will they do? What is their role?
e.g.: transportation	Work with public transportation system to provide passes/vouchers so parents can ride public transportation for free	Julie Smith, parent	Contact local transportation company to seek bus tickets, free passes, etc.

NOTE: Use the information gained in the activity on Page 14 (Who Are the Members of your School Community?) to think accurately about the potential obstacles to school-family-community partnerships. Remember that many solutions to problems are found by those experiencing the problem. Include all stakeholders in finding ways to overcome these hurdles. When people take responsibility for solutions, they often have more buy-in and more ownership of the activity.

Roles in Partnership Development

Effective and meaningful school-family-community partnerships are a collaboration of invested individuals contributing to the academic, social, and personal success of the school community. In order for the collaboration to be successful, each partner's duties and responsibilities need to be well defined. Moreover, it's vitally important that roles are understood by and communicated to all partners.

Each person must know the things they need to accomplish to contribute to the overall success of the partnership. The amount and time of contributions to be made by each partner should be specified. Also, management and control issues—whether some or all partners will manage and control the partnership—need to be identified.

"Successful parent involvement programs have clear task expectations, roles, and responsibilities, all of which are communicated to the partners."

—Becher, 1984

Members of the partnership development team will need to become aware of cultural differences when looking at roles and responsibilities. In some cultures, there are different views of schools and the roles people have in children's education. Educators are often viewed as authority figures, and parents are less likely to ask questions of them. These parents will rely on educators to explain their opinions/decisions, and they will be valued and respected by the parents. Educators and team members will need to keep this in mind when planning roles and working with family and community members from diverse cultures.

The school as a whole has responsibilities. It takes a lot of hard work and a long-term commitment to partnerships to make it work. Successful schools:

- Strengthen ties to community leaders
- Develop trust and build relationships
- Follow through on commitments
- Know and understand the needs of families, and enlist parents as liaisons
- Provide support and bring varied resources to school
- Gain an understanding of cultural and language barriers, and how culture/race, socioeconomic status, and other factors influence participation
- Build cultural awareness

In the following four pages are worksheets that examine some of the key players (parents, program administrators, principals, teachers/teachers aides, and support staff) and the roles they can play in the success of school-family-community partnerships and in increasing student achievement.

The worksheet on the following page regarding Parents' Roles and Responsibilities can show the various things parents are already doing to contribute to the educational success of their children. Many schools have found that, when they acknowledge the ways parents contribute to their children's academic achievement on a daily basis, parents often become more actively involved. Once you have completed the worksheet, consider examining all the ways your parents and family members are already involved in their children's education and finding a way to use any of these numbers in the evaluation of your school-family-community partnership.

Parents' Roles and Responsibilities

Parents play many roles in their children's education. Think about the parents of the students in your school or program and mark the answers that describe the roles that these parents play.

M	S	F	N	M = Most Parents, S = Some Parents (about ½), F = Few Parents, N = Not Known
				Parents as Nurturer. Parents provide an appropriate environment where the child will flourish physically, psychologically, and emotionally. They maintain positive learning conditions at home and provide for the child's overall health, shelter, safety, and behavior. Parents encourage and reward satisfactory achievement, and show interest in the child's school day.
				Parents as Learners. Parents obtain new skills and knowledge that will help directly and indirectly with the child's educational and social development as well as help the parents with their own development, growth, and life satisfaction.
				Parents as Supporters. Parents enroll their children in school and ensure they are properly dressed, get to school on time, and attend each day. They purchase necessary supplies and equipment and obtain required vaccinations and medical exams. They enforce policies about bedtime, television viewing, and homework.
				Parents as Communicators. Parents establish and maintain effective two-way communication flow with the child and the school.
				Parents as Audience. Parents attend many activities designed to draw them into the school and provide them with direct, personal information about the school such as open houses, back-to-school nights, athletic events, concerts, and plays.
				Parents as Volunteers. Parents can help in their own child's classroom or in other classrooms, work in the library, tutor children, make attendance calls, chaperone school functions/events, or share their expertise in enrichment programs.
				Parents as Teachers. As the child's first teachers, parents build the child's foundation for moral, intellectual, emotional, and social development. Parents can also provide enrichment activities that reinforce school learning, including reading to children, taking them on trips to the library and museums, and other home and community learning activities.
				Parents as Advisers/Advocates. Parents wisely counsel and advise their child concerning his or her personal and educational situations. If needed, they effectively and actively mediate and negotiate for the child. By parent's modeling, children can learn to be successful advocates for themselves.
				Parents as Collaborators and Problem Solvers. While working with the school and the community, parents can help study issues, solve problems, make decisions, and develop policy.
				Parents as Advisers and Decisionmakers. Often through parent advisory groups or parent-educator organizations, parents and educators work together on solutions to various problems and issues facing the school. Real power-sharing opportunities include elected school governing boards and councils.
				Parents as Partners. Parents move from the role of primary educators to a situation in which they share this role with the schools.

The Principal or Program Administrator's Roles and Responsibilities

Below is a list of responsibilities that are critical in the organization, development, and implementation of strong and effective school-family-community partnership. Review the list and rank how these are being done for your program or school. At the end of the prepared list is a place for you to include other responsibilities that you consider important for your program administrator to perform.

O	S	A	O = Do Often, S = Do Some of the Time, A = Do a Little, Almost Never
			Provide educational leadership for the other key players—other school personnel, students, parents and families, other community members.
			Set a tone for the school that is positive, friendly, and open, dedicated to serving all children equally.
			Recognize and affirm the fundamental premises of school-family-community partnerships (that is, all children can learn; parents are a valuable resource; all parents can have a positive impact; etc.).
			Take time to get to know the community served by the school—the history of interactions with the school, values and customs, local heroes, favorite pastimes, child-rearing practices, worries, aspirations.
			Assess school and community perceptions of needs and resources.
			Provide opportunities for staff, parents, and other community members to get to know each other.
			Lead a team of staff, parents, students (when appropriate), and community members in the design and development of the school-family-community partnerships plan.
			Require and encourage staff members to make use of family and community members as a resource.
			Provide staff training in school-family-community partnerships.
			Appoint qualified staff to coordinate the school's partnership efforts.
			Provide parent education on topics of interest to parents and family members.
			Establish and encourage open, two-way communication between the school and the community, and between the school and the families.
			Give family and community members a voice in school management decisions.
			Communicate regularly with all key players, soliciting their input formally and informally.
			Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of your partnerships activities, revising as necessary.
			Acknowledge and reward outstanding efforts by educators, coordinators, outreach workers, parents, community members, and children.
			Other:
			Other:
			Other:

Teachers'/Teacher's Aides' Roles and Responsibilities

Below is a list of responsibilities that are critical in increasing student achievement and developing effective school-family-community partnerships. Review the list and rank how these are being done within your school. At the end of the prepared list is a place for you to include other responsibilities that you consider important for teachers/teachers' aides to perform.

O	S	A	O = Do Often, S = Do Some of the Time, A = Do a Little, Almost Never
			Maintain high expectations for every child.
			Examine their own assumptions about academic ability and interest based on behavior, language, physical appearance, or family background.
			Take time to get to know the community represented by the children—the history of interactions with the school, values and customs, local heroes, favorite pastimes, child-rearing practices, worries, aspirations.
			Treat all children and their families with respect.
			Welcome every family into the classroom and make family members feel comfortable.
			Establish and maintain open, two-way communication with parents and other family members.
			Provide a variety of opportunities for parents to collaborate in the teaching of their children, including homework activities, class projects, classroom volunteer work, field trips, fund raising, etc.
			Participate in staff training about school-family-community partnerships.
			Participate in school activities designed to help staff and families get to know each other.
			View cultural diversity as a resource and teach children to value it.
			Identify and use ways to validate children's experiences outside the school, incorporating them into instructional activities.
			Collaborate with other professionals and parents to address each child's learning and emotional needs.
			Assess school-family-community partnership activities regularly with input from other key players, revising them as necessary.
			Never give up on any child.
			Other:
			Other:
			Other:

Support Staff Roles and Responsibilities

Much of a school's support staff is considered the "front-line staff" when it comes to partnership activities. The front-office staff are the first ones seen by visitors. The bus drivers pick up students near their homes and often meet family members. The cafeteria workers, janitors, playground monitors, school social worker, guidance counselor, nurse, and National Service members (AmeriCorps, VISTA, Senior Corps, and Learn and Serve) are often familiar with students in ways that the teachers never see.

Below is a list of responsibilities that are critical in increasing student achievement and nurturing effective school-family-community partnerships. Review the list and rank how these are being done within your school. At the end of the prepared list is a place for you to include other responsibilities that you feel are important for support staff to perform.

O	S	A	O = Do Often, S = Do Some of the Time, A = Do a Little, Almost Never
			"Front-line staff" are included in training regarding school-family-community partnerships.
			"Front-line staff" are trained with teachers and administrators to work with family and community members.
			A plan has been developed as to how "front-line staff" will work with family and community members.
			Front-office staff greet visitors warmly when they enter the main office (for instance, staff seem pleased to see them, smile, and use a pleasant tone of voice).
			Front-office staff greet visitors individually when they arrive (for instance, saying hello, calling them by name, and introducing themselves).
			Office staff have set up a system to get phone messages to teachers including when to send phone calls to the teacher's classroom, when to offer to take a message, when to give the caller information about times to call back and talk to the teacher, etc.
			Other:
			Other:
			Other:
			Other:
			Other:

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