

SOUTHEAST COMPREHENSIVE CENTER

Advancing Research, Improving Education



Policy Development Tools: Engaging Parents/Families in the School Community

Introduction

These tools are intended to provide assistance to state departments of education, school districts, and schools in improving and creating policy that supports parent/family involvement. Although the contents are drawn from SEDL's numerous research projects related to parent/family and community connections with schools, individuals may use this collection of tools in any order and may pick and choose from the set.

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Tool I

Highlights from Title I, Part A, Guidance

This tool helps participants develop a better understanding of the scope of the NCLB mandates in regard to parent/family involvement. Participants engage in reviewing and discussing the connections across levels of the system as well as the broader scope of NCLB.

Directions:

Step 1:

Ask participants to review Tool I Handout, *Highlights from Title I, Part A Guidance*. Be sure to point out the coding system for designating state, district, and school responsibilities.

Step 2:

Ask participants to review their current policy and compare that policy to the requirements described in the handout.

- ✓ How does the policy correlate to mandates described in the handout?
- ✓ What requirements are clearly supported in policy?
- ✓ What requirements are clearly neglected in policy?

Step 3:

Ask participants to make a list of requirements that need to be addressed as the policy is refined. Record the list on chart paper or other appropriate media.

Tool I Handout – Highlights from Title I, Part A Guidance

This document organizes text from *Title I, Part A Guidance* (USDE) into topics that commonly align to district and school plans. As you review this document, note the coding on the side that designates the roles the state department of education, the district, and the school should assume for each requirement. Text in quotation marks has been lifted intact from the document to emphasize the intent of the law; page numbers for the quoted sections of text are in parentheses at the end of the quoted and paraphrased section.

This is the first time, “parent” involvement has been given a statutory definition (p. 3) by federal legislation.

Parents are defined as “natural parent, a legal guardian, or other person standing in loco parentis (such as a grandparent or step parent with whom the child lives, or as person who is legally responsible for the child’s welfare.” (p. 4)

Improvement Plan



State Educational Agency (SEA) Mandate—Statewide Improvement Plan must

- include processes for parent involvement (p. 8)
- provide procedures to review “each” LEA’s plan to determine if the LEA’s parent involvement activities are in line with the law” (p. 9)
- include parents in the planning process for state improvement plan (p. 8)



Local Educational Agency (LEA)/School Mandate—School Improvement Plan must include strategies that

- involve parents in efforts to raise student achievement (p. 10)
- incorporate a written policy and a plan for parent involvement into improvement efforts (p. 10)



LEA Mandates—LEA Plan must provide actions that

- involve parents in decisions about how it allots the school’s funds for parent involvement activities (p. 18)
- “be developed jointly with, and agreed upon with, the parents” (p. 11)
- “distributed to all parents of children qualifying for Title I” (p. 11)
- provide “coordination, technical assistance, and other support necessary to assist...in planning and implementing effective parental involvement activities to improve student academic achievement and school performance” (p. 11)
- “build the school’s and parent’s capacity for strong parental involvement” (p. 11)



LEA Mandates—Plan Evaluation must

- conduct, “with the involvement of parents, an annual evaluation of the content and effectiveness of the parental involvement policy to improve the academic quality of schools”—This evaluation must include specific strategies to

- identify “barriers to greater participation by parents in parental involvement activities, with particular attention to parents who are economically disadvantaged, are disabled, have limited English proficiency, have limited literacy, or are of any racial or ethnic minority background” (p. 12)
- use findings from the evaluation to design improved strategies for more effective involvement (p. 12)
- use findings to revise the LEA’s parent involvement policy as needed (p. 12)
- publicize the evaluation information for all stakeholders (p. 19)



LEA Mandates—*Within the plan, LEAs must*

- provide an explanation of the school’s, LEA’s, and SEA’s actions to address low achievement (p. 11)
- describe LEA’s expectations for parent involvement to help support these actions (p. 11)



LEA Mandates—*In regard to individual school plans, LEAs must*

- review and approve each school’s plans (p. 21)
- ensure that each school’s plan is “developed and revised in consultation with parents, school, staff, along with the LEA serving the school, and outside experts no later than 3 months after the school is identified as not meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and must cover a 2-year period” (p. 20)



School Mandate—*Information made available to parents about school-parent interactions must*

- use the processes described above to provide appropriate communication
- include a description of how the school-parent compact will be created (p. 22)
- describe the structures to “involve parents, in an organized, ongoing, and timely way, in the planning, review, and improvement of...including
 - planning, review, and improvement of the school parent involvement policy
 - joint development of any school program under...” (p. 23)
- describe how parents will be involved in decisions about how it allots the school’s funds for parent involvement activities (p. 18)
- “be developed jointly with, and agreed upon with, the parents” (p. 22)
- provide a description of how parents will be involved in “coordination, technical assistance, and other support necessary to assist...in planning and implementing effective parental involvement activities to improve student academic achievement and school performance”
- “build the school’s and parent’s capacity for strong parental involvement” (p. 11)
- be updated periodically to “meet the changing needs of parents and the school” (p. 22)
- describe how parents will be involved in efforts to and how the school will “refine the instructional program, in an instructionally useful manner, to help all children ...meet the [academic performance expectations]” (p. 19)
- “provide parents with enough relevant information to help them decide what is best for the child” (p. 19)
- provide a feedback loop that gives parents an opportunity to “comment before any action under a restructuring plan takes place” (p. 21)



School Mandate—*Involvement efforts must*

- include a convened annual meeting, at a time that is convenient to parents to inform them of their school’s participation in Title I and to explain the NCLB requirements and the rights of parents involved in those programs...In order to keep parents

informed, schools must invite to this meeting all parents of children participating in...and encourage them to attend. Schools must offer a flexible number of additional parental involvement meetings, such as in the morning or evening so that as many parents as possible are able to attend” (p. 23)

- “coordinate and integrate” parent involvement strategies under...with parent involvement strategies under other programs” (p. 11), including “coordinating and integrating parent involvement programs and activities” with the following programs:
 - Head Start
 - Reading First
 - Early Reading First
 - Even Start Family Literacy Programs
 - Home Instruction Programs for Preschool Youngsters
 - Parents as Teachers
 - Public preschools
 - Other relevant programs, such as Title III (p. 29)
- “develop appropriate roles for community-based organizations, including faith-based organizations, and businesses in parental involvement activities”...focusing the work on improved “student academic achievement” (p. 29)



School Mandate—*School-Parent Compact must*

- “employ strategies to increase parental involvement...all parents in a school-wide program school are eligible to participate in parent involvement activities. However, given that the focus of a school-wide program focused on children of high need, efforts should target parents of these children” (p. 25)
- “be developed jointly with, and agreed upon with, the parents” (p. 24)
- be in writing
- describe the following elements
 - “school’s responsibility to provide high-quality curriculum and instruction in a supportive and effective learning environment that enables children served under...to meet the States’ student academic achievement standards” (p. 25)
 - “ways in which parents will be responsible for supporting their children’s learning” (p. 25)
 - describes the “importance of communication between teachers and parents on an ongoing basis” through, at a minimum,
 - “parent-teacher conferences, annually at least, to discuss the individual child’s achievement” (p. 25)
 - “frequent reports to parents on their child’s programs” (p. 25)
 - “reasonable access to staff, opportunities to volunteer and participate in their child’s class, and observation of classroom activities” (p. 25)



School Mandate—*For School-wide Title I programs, schools must*

- “employ strategies to increase parental involvement...all parents in a school-wide program school are eligible to participate in parent involvement activities. However, given that the focus of a school-wide program is to raise the achievement of the lowest-achieving students, a school-wide program should ensure that its parent involvement activities include the parents of the lowest-achieving students in order that they may better assist in the education of the child” (p. 24)

Communication General Requirements



SEA/LEA/School Mandates—In communication with parents and the public, SEAs, LEAs, and Schools must

- provide information in
 - “understandable and uniform format”
 - “alternative formats upon request”
 - “a language that parents can understand to the extent practicable” (p. 8)



SEA Mandates—Information communicated to parents and information communicated to schools about how LEAs and schools communicate with parents must

- support the “collection and dissemination of effective parent involvement practices”...based on” current research, meeting highest professional and technical standards,” on “effective parent involvement that fosters achievement to high standards for all children” (p. 8)
- lower barriers to participation by parents in school planning, review, and improvement experiences (p. 8)

Communication Parent Rights



LEA Mandate—Information on parent rights must

- notify the parents of each student attending the school of their right to request information about the “professional qualifications of both the teachers and the paraprofessionals who teach and work with their children in an understandable format” (p. 12)

Communication Report Card



SEA Mandate—Report cards must

- include information and “data elements” required by NCLB:
 - assessments
 - accountability
 - teacher quality
 - data from all the LEAs in the state (p. 9)
- meet the same communication requirements previously described (p. 9)



SEA Mandate—Reports cards may

- use printed or other media (p. 10)
- focus on wide dissemination (p. 10)



LEAs/School Mandate—Report cards must

- use a “broader means of dissemination” including the Internet, media, or public agencies (p. 10)
- include readable charts in an understandable and uniform format that all can understand. (p. 13)

Communication and Other Performance Related Information



SEA Mandate—Information on schools in corrective action must

- provide notice to parents if their child’s school is in corrective action (p. 10)
- include the following information in its communication:
 - reason the school is in corrective action
 - level of corrective action
 - specific explanations of how parents can “participate in upgrading the quality of the LEA.” (p. 10)



LEA Mandate—Information on the progress of each school must

- follow the dissemination requirements above
- “communicate to parents, teachers, principals, schools, and the community” (p. 19)
- provide “prompt” notice about corrective action with an explanation that includes:
 - a description of the performance of all schools served by the LEA and SEA
 - the “reasons for identification” as a school in corrective action” (p. 19)
 - a description of “how parents can become involved in addressing the academic issues that caused the school to be identified for school improvement” (p. 19)
 - a description of the parent’s options to transfer a child to another schools or supplemental services (p. 19) including
 - annual notice to parents of availability, identity of approved providers, brief description of services, qualifications, and demonstrated effectiveness of each provider (p. 21)
 - assistance to parents on choosing a provider if requested (p. 21)
 - Note: Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) applies here (p. 21)
- provide parents and the community with “information explaining”
 - what the school is doing to address the problem of low achievement
 - what the LEA or the SEA is doing to help the school address the problem
 - a description of specific corrective actions or restructuring if applicable
 - “inform parents about the academic achievement of students at the school/schools to which their child may transfer” (p. 19)
- use these communication methods to “refine the instructional program, in an instructionally useful manner, to help all children in ____ meet the ____ ” (p. 19)
- “provide parents with enough relevant information to help them decide what is best for the child” (p. 19)
- allow parents an opportunity to “comment before any action under a restructuring plan takes place” (p. 21)
- allow parents to participate in the development of any restructuring plans” (p. 22)



LEA Mandate—Information on the progress of each school may

- “include a description of the special academic programs and facilities, and before- or after-school programs available at those schools” (p. 20)
- “include the professional qualifications of teachers in the core academic subjects” (p. 20)
- identify parent involvement opportunities at those schools or in the district (p. 20)

**School Mandate**—*Information provided to parents must*

- include a description of how the school will notify parents if their child has been assigned to a teacher who is not highly qualified (p. 23)
- include information on
 - description and explanation of the school’s curriculum
 - information on the forms of academic assessment used to measure student progress
 - information on the proficiency levels students are expected to meet
 - act upon parent request: “the school must provide opportunities for regular meetings for parents to formulate suggestions, to participate, as appropriate, in decisions about the education of their children” (p. 24)

Technical Assistance**SEA Mandate**—*Efforts must*

- “encourage an LEA and its schools...to offer family literacy services if the LEA or school determines that a substantial number of Title I students have parents who do not have secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent or who have low levels of literacy” (p. 26)
- provide technical assistance to LEAs on parent involvement (p. 8)

**LEA Mandate**—*Professional development that is offered must*

- include specific training to support “implementation of parental involvement requirements” (p. 21)
- include strategies that staff can use to learn “how to work with parents as equal partners” (p. 27)
- “educate teachers, pupil services personnel, principals, and other staff in the value and utility of the contributions of parents” (p. 27)
- provide assistance in how to “reach out to, communicate with, and work with parents, implement and coordinate parent programs, and build ties between parents and school” (p. 27)

Professional development that is offered to staff may

- “involve parents in developing this training, in order to improve its effectiveness” (p. 27)

**LEA and School Mandate**—*Efforts to increase parent capacity must*

- “ensure effective involvement of parents” (p. 26)
- “support a partnerships among the school, the parents, and the community to improve student academic achievement through
 - training
 - information
 - coordination of activities (p. 26)
- provide assistance and training “to help parents understand topics that will help them become equal partners with educators in improving their children’s academic achievement,” (p. 26) including such topics as
 - State’s academic content standards
 - State’s student academic achievement standards
 - State and local assessments, including alternative assessments

- Parent involvement requirements of NCLB
 - Strategies to help parents monitor their children’s progress
 - Strategies on “how to work with educators to improve the achievement of their[parents’] child” (p. 26)
- provide materials and training to help parents work with their children to improve their children’s achievement (p. 27)
- use technology to foster involvement (27)

Efforts to increase parent capacity may

- “arrange for and conduct in-home conferences between teachers and other educators who work directly with participating children and the children’s parents” (p. 28)
- “provide training to parents in how to enhance the involvement of other parents” (p. 28)

Complaint Procedures



SEA Mandates—In responding to complaints, SEAs must

- adopt “written procedures for resolving conflicts” (p. 16)
- include a statement within the “SEAs procedures” that requires LEAs to “disseminate, free of charge, adequate information about the complaint procedures to parents of students, and appropriate private school officials” (p. 16)

Allocation of Funds



LEA Mandate—If the LEA’s allocation is greater than \$500,000, the LEA must

- “reserve not less than one (1) percent of its Title I, Part A allocation” to carry out these provisions, “including promoting family literacy and parenting skills,” calculating this allocation on the “basis of the LEAs total Title I, Part A allocation” (p. 16)
- apply funds from this formula at the school level

If the LEA’s allocation is less than \$500,000, the LEA must

- fulfill the same provisions, but no allocation formula is required (p. 16)



LEA Mandates—In determining how the LEA allocates funds for parent involvement, the LEA must

- “involve parents...in decisions about how it allots to schools the funds the LEA has reserved for parental involvement activities” (p. 18)
- use the definition for parents provided above to define parent representation on fund allocation decisions (p. 18)



LEA Mandates—At the district level, if the allocation is greater than \$500,000, LEA must

- fund its activities after allowing for the one (1) percent to be passed directly to the schools (e.g., the LEA does not fund its activities from the 1%); funds provided to private schools may come from the 1% (p. 18)



Schools Mandate—In allocating funds schools may

- use funds to pay “reasonable and necessary expenses associated with local parental involvement activities, including transportation and childcare costs, to enable parents to participate in school-related meetings and training sessions” (p. 28)

- use funds to pay “reasonable and necessary expenses” for trainings and workshops that are regionally based so they can “provide information and, if possible, training on the conference topics to other parents,” and “out-of-state conferences and workshops may be allowable in some special cases” (p. 28)
- use a small percentage (less than 5 % is available for items other than “distributed among the district’s schools”) for other types of outreach, such as Parent Information Resource Centers (PIRCs) (p. 28)

Note:

The full version of Title I, Part A, Guidance is available on the USDE Web site at www.ed.gov.

There are specific requirements for the parents of special education students and the parents of students identified as English language learners. The rights of these parents are clearly defined in the Guidance. In brief, those requirements state that SEAs, LEAs, and schools must provide accommodations for the parents of these children and ensure that parent involvement activities align to the mandates of all appropriate programs.

Tool 2

Questions to Guide Policy Decisions

This tool provides guidance to participants as they develop policy to support the Title I requirements for parent/family involvement.

Directions:

Step 1:

Use the questions on the handout to guide discussion about **current and future policy** and to determine if the policy addresses the mandates of Title I. Sharing the questions prior to the meeting will help focus these efforts. Questions focus on the following topics.

1. Expectations:
 - Overall
 - Planning
 - Capacity Building
2. Ongoing Support:
 - Dissemination of Information
 - Professional Development for Educators
 - Technical Assistance for Parents/Families
3. Communication Mandates:
 - Supplemental Educational Services
 - School Choice
 - Report Cards
 - Highly Qualified Staff
 - Parent Rights
4. Monitoring and Evaluation Efforts:
 - State-Level
 - District and School Levels
 - Parents/Families

Step 2:

Use the same questions to guide discussion about **current and future strategies and related actions** that are intended to support the implementation of this policy. If there are any questions that cannot be answered, participants need to delve into that area more deeply from two perspectives:

1. Does the policy support efforts to implement effective strategies?
2. Do the identified strategies align to the policy?

If the answer to either question is no, participants will need to make appropriate changes.

Tool 2 Handout – Questions to Guide Policy Decisions

Consider these questions as you review and discuss the current and future policy.

I. Expectations:

Overall

- ✓ What are expectations in regard to parent/family involvement? Consider these expectations from the viewpoint of all stakeholders: Title I/NCLB, state department of education, district, schools, parents/families, students, and community members.
- ✓ How are these expectations to be communicated at each level and to all stakeholders?
- ✓ How does each stakeholder group know expectations are met?
- ✓ How are the expectations aligned to current research and knowledge of best practice in this field?

Planning

- ✓ How are parents/families engaged in jointly developing and planning for improvement?
- ✓ At all levels of the system—state, district, and school?
- ✓ According to research and best practice, what strategies are most effective for this process?

Capacity Building

- ✓ How do the state, the district, and the school describe “capacity building” in regard to parent/family involvement?
- ✓ How does each policy making group communicate this description in terms of realistic actions or strategies that districts and schools might adopt?
- ✓ How does each policy group’s definition of “capacity building” align to research and best practice?

2. Ongoing Support:

Dissemination of Information

- ✓ What information will be disseminated?
- ✓ How is the disseminated information aligned to the mandates of NCLB?
- ✓ How is information disseminated?
- ✓ When is information disseminated?
- ✓ What does research and best practice reveal about dissemination of information concerning parent/family involvement?

Professional Development for Educators

- ✓ How do the state department of education, districts, and schools determine professional development needs for parent/family involvement in relation to NCLB mandates for educators?
- ✓ What types of professional development or technical assistance are provided to state, district, and school staffs as well as to parents/families and community members?
- ✓ What kind of professional development is described in research and best practice to be most effective and needed to improve and increase parent/family involvement?

Technical Assistance for Parents/Families

- ✓ How do the state, the district, and the schools determine technical assistance needs for parent/family involvement in relation to NCLB for parents/families?
- ✓ What types of technical assistance are provided to parents/families?

- ✓ What types of technical assistance for parents/families are described as most effective in increasing parent/family involvement and best meets the needs of parents/families in research and best practice?

3. Communication Mandates:

Supplemental Education Services (SES)

- ✓ How does the state provide adequate information to districts, schools, and parents/families about SES, so they can take appropriate action? How do districts and schools provide adequate information to their staffs and parents/families about SES, so they can take appropriate action?
- ✓ How do the state, the district, and the school draw on learnings from research and best practice to support this communication?

School Choice

- ✓ How does the state provide adequate information to districts, schools, and parents/families about school choice, so they can take appropriate action? How do the districts and schools provide adequate information to their staffs and parents/families about school choice, so they can take appropriate action?
- ✓ How do the state, the district, and the school draw on learnings from research and best practice to support this communication?

Report Cards

- ✓ How does the state provide adequate information to districts, schools, and parents/families about report cards, so they can take appropriate action? How do the districts and schools provide adequate information to their staffs and parents/families about report cards, so they can take appropriate action?
- ✓ How do the state, the district, and the schools draw on learnings from research and best practice to support this communication?

Highly Qualified Staff

- ✓ How does the state provide adequate information to districts, schools, and parents/families about the requirements for highly qualified staff, so they can take appropriate action? How do the districts and schools provide adequate information to their staffs and parents/families about high qualified staff, so they can take appropriate action?
- ✓ How do the state, the district, and the school draw on learnings from research and best practice to support this communication?

Parent Rights

- ✓ How does the state provide adequate information to districts, schools, and parents/families about the right of parents in the following areas: students whose first language is not English, homeless children, or other special need areas? How do the districts and schools provide adequate information to their staffs and parents/families about the rights of parents in the following areas: students whose first language is not English, homeless children, or other special need areas, so they can take appropriate action?
- ✓ How do the state, the district, and the schools draw on learnings from research and best practice to support this communication?

4. Monitoring and Evaluation Efforts:

State-Level

- ✓ How does the state monitor and evaluate districts and schools for each of the mandated actions for NCLB? How does the state monitor and evaluate the expectations set for district, and school implementation of parent/family involvement?
- ✓ How does the state encourage districts and schools to move past compliance and push districts and schools to “meaningfully engage” parents/families in their children’s education?
- ✓ How does the state monitor and evaluate its own efforts?
- ✓ How are parents/families involved in efforts to monitor and evaluate statewide improvement efforts?
- ✓ What strategies does the state adopt for monitoring and evaluation based on research and best practice?

District and School Levels

- ✓ How does the state assist districts and schools in monitoring and evaluating each of the mandated actions for NCLB?
- ✓ How are parents/families involved in efforts to monitor and evaluate statewide improvement efforts?
- ✓ What strategies do the districts and schools adopt for monitoring and evaluation based on research and best practice?

Parents/Families

- ✓ What tools does the state provide parents/families to help them monitor and evaluate how districts/schools are addressing each of the mandated actions for NCLB?
- ✓ What strategies or tools does the state draw from for research and best practice to support parent/family involvement in monitoring and evaluation?

Tool 3

What Does Research Say about Parent/Family Involvement Policy?

This tool guides participants as they explore research and best practice recommendations concerning parent/family involvement policy.

Directions:

Step 1:

Preview documents that contain descriptions of research on parent/family involvement policy and related recommendations.

Research Resources

- ✓ The SEDL Web site has numerous documents written in a variety of styles that may be useful. While there are many resources archived in the SEDL electronic library, the “Connections” section of the Web site provides easy access to focused research briefs, detailed syntheses of research, an annotated database, and web-based learning modules. These materials can be used in portions or in their entirety. (www.sedl.org)
- ✓ There are also appropriate materials that can be found by searching the Internet. However, there are also organizations that provide easy access to materials on parent/family involvement on their Web sites such as, Harvard Family Research Project, state Parent Information Resource Centers, Public Education Network, Communities in Schools, and many more Web sites.

Step 2:

Choose two to three documents to share with participants. The choice of documents will be determined by the needs of the staff. While making a full report available for those involved is important, a smaller portion of a resource can be used during a meeting to foster discussion and review. Engaging those involved in policy work to review these materials themselves is an important part of the process. As facilitators translate the information from the original document for their use, they interpret the material and frame it from their viewpoint. Providing original documents or selected text allows those involved to develop a shared understanding and collective perspective about important policy issues.

Step 3:

Develop a strategy for sharing the research and its recommendations. While a set of presentation slides might be easier for the facilitator to control, it is not necessarily appropriate for the audience. Be creative. Talk to a reading teacher about effective strategies to engage individuals in analyzing text to develop processes for reviewing research. For example,

- Share snippets of high interest research reports, and ask participants to use a reflective tool to process the information.
- Use the handout that follows to guide pairs of participants as they collaboratively review and discuss the materials provided. In using this handout, participants can complete the entire document or work through smaller chunks with whole group discussion periodically to process new ideas.

Tool 3 Handout – What Does the Research about Parent/Family Involvement Say?

Review the materials on effective parent/family involvement policy you were provided and discuss this information with those seated around you. What are the key strategies, approaches, or concepts discussed?

➞

➞

➞

➞

➞

➞

Quickly review the ideas you listed, and then highlight the status of the strategies, approaches, or concepts as shown below:

➞ **BLUE** – Policy currently exists that aligns to what is found in the research.

➞ **Green** – Policy does not currently exist that aligns with the research.

➞ **Orange** – I'm not sure; I do not have enough information.

What key ideas do you need to share with others about the research that supports effective policy on parent/family involvement in schools?

What additional information do you need before you can use this information in a meaningful way?

Tool 4

Effective Parent/Family Involvement

This tool encourages users to consider four issues of importance for all stakeholder groups as they review and create parent/family involvement policies.

1. **Partnerships:** NCLB requires that parents/families be involved in “joint development”; that parents/families are given opportunities for “meaningful involvement”; and that schools “build the capacity” of staff and parents/families for involvement. Unfortunately, these terms, while providing insight into the intent of the law, do not provide a solid framework for the work. By defining how they will partner with stakeholders, policymakers can integrate this definition into modified or new policies.
2. **Education:** One of the most difficult aspects of parent/family involvement is the varied roles and expectations stakeholders have about the purpose of “education.” There is an assumption that everyone in a community shares the same beliefs about the purpose of education. However, research has shown that this is not true. Each person defines the purpose of education by her or his experiences, education, culture, community context, and other contextual factors. By clarifying how the community—district and school staff, parents/families, students, and community members—defines the purpose of education, policymakers can ensure that policy is aligned to the school community’s expectations.
3. **Parent/Family Involvement and School Improvement:** Decades of educational research has led to the identification of common qualities in high-performing schools. The list provided in the handout gives a glimmer of the range of factors common to effective schools. Often parent/family engagement is set aside while academics are addressed, because staff underestimate the value of parent/family involvement. A simple discussion of these five factors can help raise awareness of parent/family involvement as an effective strategy to support student learning.
4. **Types of Involvement:** Districts and schools commonly engage parents/families in ways that are not aligned to the types of involvement recommended by research and best practice. If staff are expected to follow these recommended types, policy has to encourage and support new ways of engaging parents/families in their children’s education. Policy needs to support an array of types of involvement that are aligned to research.

What to Do:

Step 1:

Review the four issues and decide whether to explore all of them or select individual ones. The choice of issues to discuss is dependent upon the needs of the system. Use the appropriate sheet from the Tool 4 Handout with participants for note taking and sharing key ideas. Remember the discussion around the issues is intended to be open and collaborative.

Tool 4 Handout – Effective Parent/Family Involvement

Partnerships

Consider the following definitions for educational partnerships.

Efforts to create and foster educational partnerships in our community include . . .

- *Shared understanding of educational issues and important goals necessary to promote academic success for EVERY child.*
- *Shared responsibility and leadership in creating a collaborative environment that supports the involvement of families, community members, and organizations in supporting the educational needs of ALL children.*

Use a highlighter to mark the phrases or words in the definitions above that would best define how you want to engage parents/families as partners in your school community.

Share the items you highlighted with a person next to you.

In the space provided, work with the person next to you to write your ideas about how policy needs to reflect these ideas.

Tool 4 Handout – Effective Parent/Family Involvement

Purposes for Education

Review the following explanations of the purpose for education, then join with two other colleagues and discuss how any or all of these explanations are reflective of your own views for the purposes of education.

- *Civil society depends on educating young people to become responsible, thoughtful, and enterprising citizens.*
- *Progress in every practical field depends on having a workforce that has the capacity to perform needed tasks and learn new knowledge and skills.*
- *One's individual development and the capacity to fulfill one's own purposes can depend on an adequate preparation in childhood.*

Consider what your school community needs. What words or phrases would you like to add or remove from these explanations to describe the purpose of education in your community?

How would you incorporate this definition into existing and future policy?

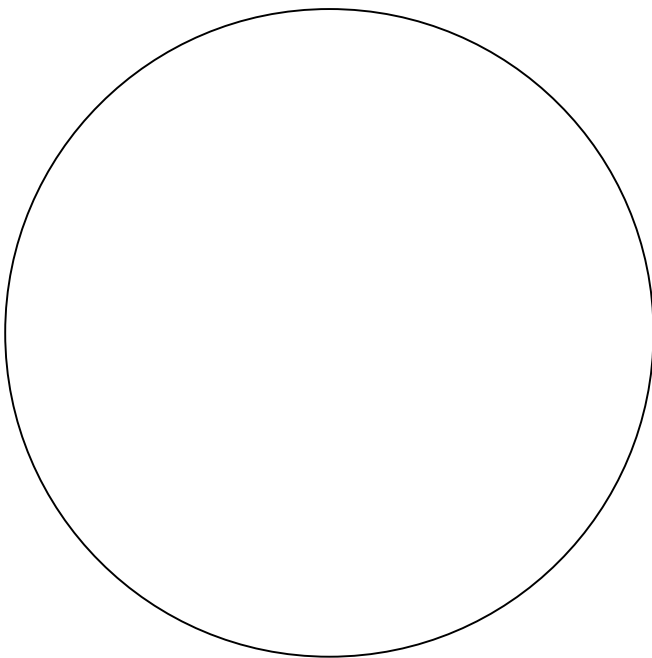
Tool 4 Handout – Effective Parent/Family Involvement

School Improvement Research

Numerous researchers have identified essential qualities of high-performing schools. The five qualities listed below are commonly seen in many of these lists.

As you consider these lists, take a moment to consider how the policies in your system allocate time and resources to each quality. Then use the pie chart at the bottom of the page to illustrate the percentage of time and resources that should be allocated to each of the five qualities.

- ✓ *A shared understanding of goals and expectations for all involved in the school system is clearly communicated and shared with all stakeholders.*
- ✓ *High academic standards clearly define what students should know and be able to do.*
- ✓ *A strong cadre of leaders provides support for the goals and expectations of the school and the school community.*
- ✓ *Procedures for purposeful collection and analysis of data on students, programs, and staff underpin all decisions.*
- ✓ *Structures that establish strong, collaborative relationships with parent/family and community partners are in place.*



Discuss the percentages noted on your pie chart with colleagues near you.

Share your discussion with the whole group and then, as a group, determine the percentages of time and resources policy should support concerning parent/family involvement in your system.

Tool 4 Handout – Effective Parent/Family Involvement

Types of Involvement

Review and discuss how each of these types of involvement is or is not common in your system and which ones should be made a priority through parent/family involvement policies.

Type of Parent/Family Involvement in Education[^]	
From the School Perspective	From the Parent/Family Perspective
Fostering Supportive Home Environments	
Assisting parents/families with parenting skills and helping to create home conditions to support student academic achievement	Seeking out and participating in activities to increase parenting skills and creating home conditions that will support academic achievement
Promoting Shared Decision Making	
Including parent/family members as partners in school decisions	Learning about and seeking to be involved in decision-making groups
Expanding Family-School Communication	
Promoting effective two-way communication between school staff and individuals or groups of parent/family members	Taking advantage of and fostering new avenues for communication with the school staff, local support groups, and other parents/family members
Coordinating Resources and Services	
Uniting efforts and programs to provide services for families	Participating and learning about services, programs, and activities that can improve the parent's/family's lifestyle
Fostering Volunteer Support	
Organizing and supporting parents/family members in their efforts to support the school and its students	Learning about and participating in programs that support the school and its students
Supporting Youth Development	
Providing services for students, such as health and physical development, creative expression, and leadership development	Seeking out and ensuring that all parents/family members—adult and child—take advantage of opportunities to address health and physical issues, learn about areas of interest, and develop leadership skills
Supporting Learning Outside of School	
Involving parents/families and partner organizations to support learning in a variety of settings other than the classroom	Learning about and taking advantage of opportunities to support children's efforts to learn or study outside of the classroom
Expanding Community Development	
Involving the school in planning and decision-making as a community institution, as well as creating opportunities for community support groups to use the school's resources to help meet the needs of the students and their parents/families	Participating in and supporting efforts to ensure that community planning and decision-making groups consider educational issues in their work as well as helping the wider community learn about and draw upon school resources that can help support students and their parents/families

[^] This handout is adapted from materials created by the National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools, SEDL (2006).

Tool 5

Reviewing and Planning Policy Worksheet

This tool provides questions and direction for participants as they review existing policy and make plans for improving that policy.

What to Do:

Step 1:

Collect sample parent/family involvement policies from other states, districts, schools, or organizations. Although there are many ways to do this, the Internet provides easy access to a wide range of policy samples. When choosing samples to share, include varied formats and approaches as well as samples that are both well written and poorly written. This will help foster general discussion and provide examples to help participants know what they do and do not want.

Step 2:

Share these sample policies with the participants, and then use the worksheet to help them determine the strengths and weaknesses of the policy they are reviewing.

Step 3:

Ask participants to work through the remaining questions on the worksheet in pairs or as a whole group. Several of the pages correspond to other tools in this set of tools. However, since each section is on a separate page, you can choose which pages to use.

Tool 5 Handout – Reviewing and Planning Policy Worksheet

Reviewing Policy Samples

Use the T-Chart below to record observations about the sample policy documents you have been given.

<i>List the strengths you see in the policies you've reviewed.</i>	<i>List the weaknesses you see in the policies you've reviewed.</i>

Consider the issues discussed as you reviewed the policies in relation to the needs of your school community. What policy issues have the greatest priority in your community? Explain why.

Tool 5 Handout – Reviewing and Planning Policy Worksheet

Focusing on Policy

How will implementing policies to address these issues impact student achievement and anticipate student needs?

How will implementing policies to address these issues provide greater support to parents/families as they engage in their children’s education?

Tool 5 Handout – Reviewing and Planning Policy Worksheet

Types of Involvement

In what ways, should the following types of involvement be supported through policy?

Fostering Supportive Home Environments



Promoting Shared Decision Making



Expanding Parent/Family-School Communication



Coordinating Resources and Services



Fostering Volunteer Support



Supporting Youth Development



Supporting Learning Outside of School



Expanding Community Development

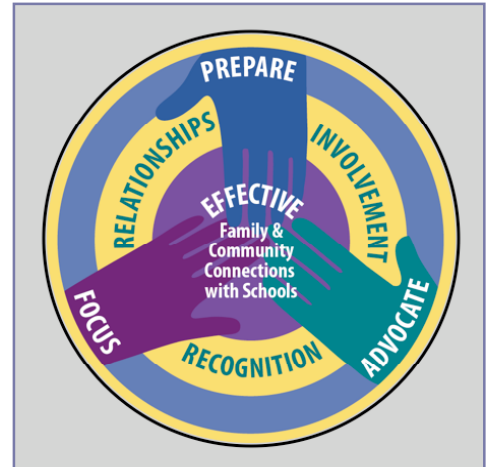


Tool 5 Handout – Reviewing and Planning Policy Worksheet

Effective Parent/Family Involvement Characteristics and Actions

Research and best practice have demonstrated that effective programs have common characteristics and actions. The graphic to the right demonstrates the connections across the characteristics and actions. Staff and families engage in activities that promote . . .

- ✓ **Relationships** among parent/family, community members, and school staff that foster trust and collaboration.
- ✓ **Recognition** of families' needs and differences in class and culture that encourage greater understanding and respect among all involved.
- ✓ **Involvement** of all stakeholders in shared partnerships and mutual responsibility for student learning.



Staff and families actualize these characteristics by implementing strategies that result in the following actions:

- ✓ **Prepare** all those involved, both staff and families, to do the work.
- ✓ **Focus** the work on meaningful outcomes and purposes that relate directly to what students are expected to learn.
- ✓ **Advocate** an inclusive educational culture that involves all stakeholders in the work to support students in their academic pursuits.

The foundation for efforts that build and support these characteristics and actions comes from policy.

For your school community, which of these characteristics and actions are the most challenging? Why?

How does your current or developing policy align to what research reveals about effective parent/family involvement programs?

Actions	Characteristics		
	Relationships among parent/family, community members, and school staff that foster trust and collaboration.	Recognition of families' needs and differences in class and culture that encourage greater understanding and respect among all involved.	Involvement of all stakeholders in shared partnerships and mutual responsibility for student learning.
Prepare all those involved, both staff and families, to do the work.	Current	Current	Current
	Developing	Developing	Developing
Focus the work on meaningful outcomes and purposes that relate directly to what students are expected to learn.	Current	Current	Current
	Developing	Developing	Developing
Advocate an inclusive educational culture that involves all stakeholders in the work to support students in their academic pursuits.	Current	Current	Current
	Developing	Developing	Developing