

Indicator: The school's key documents (Parent Involvement Policy, Mission Statement, Compact, Homework Guidelines, Classroom Visit Procedures) are annually distributed and frequently communicated to teachers, school personnel, parents, and students. (5183)

Evidence Review:

Research shows that schools can improve their students' learning by engaging parents in ways that directly relate to their children's academic progress, maintaining a consistent message of what is expected of parents, and reaching parents directly, personally, and with a trusting approach (Epstein, 1995; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Patrikakou, Weissberg, Redding, & Walberg, 2005; Redding, 2000, Redding, Langdon, Meyer, & Sheley, 2004). Thus, effective parent engagement must be comprehensive in nature, with the school consistently interfacing with parents at many points, in many venues, over the course of the schooling years (Swap, 1993). This is vital for all students at all grade levels, in all settings (urban to rural), and even more so for those with disabilities and English language learners (CII, 2011).

Whenever parents meet with school personnel, the school's purpose and its supporting documents can be discussed and reinforced. The supporting documents include the Compact, learning standards, improvement plan, and homework policy. An ongoing conversation between parents and teachers around these documents builds understanding and a sense of common endeavor toward each student's success. The open house and parent-teacher-student conference are typical points of contact between parents and school personnel, and each can be planned to advance an understanding of the school community's purpose, each member's role in that purpose, and the relevance to each child. (Redding, 2006, p. 158)

An ongoing conversation between parents and teachers around key documents and events connecting the home and school builds reciprocal trust and a sense of common purpose. Parents should receive "practical, jargon-free guidance on ways to maintain supportive verbal interaction with their children, establish a quiet place for study at home, encourage good reading and study habits, and model and support respectful and responsible behaviors" (CII, 2011, p. 185). Families need "honest and timely information about budgets, policies, and student achievement. Use test data to identify problem areas that need improvement" (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007, pp. 190-191). Further, the school should provide "culturally and linguistically appropriate opportunities for parents to meet with one another to encourage the sharing of norms, standards, and parenting concerns and successes" and should provide "teachers and staff with professional development and consistent policies to build their capacity to work with all families and to reinforce the school's clear expectations of parents. This includes promoting a strengths-based (rather than deficit-based) view of families" (CII, 2011, pp. 185-186). Parents appreciate knowing:

- how their children are doing,
- what the school is doing,
- what the school expects of parents, and
- how parents may contribute to the operation and improvement of the school. (ADI, 2010)

The current version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (also referred to as No Child Left Behind) requires in Section 1118 that schools receiving Title I funds have a written Parent Involvement Policy, that the policy is written with the assistance of parents, and that it establish expectations for parental involvement, coordinates with early childhood program's parent involvement strategies, and identifies and attempts to eliminate barriers to greater participation and more effective involvement. Research and best practices from exemplary districts exhibit the need for all schools to develop a shared vision of family engagement (Henderson et al., 2007; Westmoreland, Rosenberg, Lopez, & Weiss, 2009). It is necessary to go beyond a compliance-driven approach; schools that lack a systematic approach to design and implementation of parent involvement efforts will be ineffective in improving student outcomes (Mattingly, Prislín, McKenzie, Rodriguez, & Kayzar, 2002; Paredes, O'Malley, & Amarillas, 2012).

To support this effort, an effective Parent Involvement Policy must focus on improving student achievement and should include a vision statement developed with and for families, highlighting the importance of family–school partnerships (Henderson et al., 2007; Westmoreland et al., 2009).

Parents should organize around a shared vision such as increasing the number of children ready for college or providing a quality education for all children, rather than around interests that often compete and divide parents...the school and parent visions should be aligned and a learning culture developed where educators and parents learn together. Parents should see the benefit of advocating for *all* children, as well as their own. Family engagement should not be an add-on or a program but should be interwoven throughout the school—its instructional program, planning and management, and other aspects of school life so that schools are places of connection. (Moles & Fege, 2011, p. 9)

Edwards (2011) reminds us that it is necessary to define parental involvement clearly so everyone understands what it means for your school community—everyone from senior district administrators to teachers to bus drivers, and a shared vision honors and supports each partner's role in supporting student success (Westmoreland et al., 2009).

To be effective, statements of vision, mission, and purpose must be aligned to practices, including particular links that engage parents and make them full partners (Redding, 2006). An effective mission should be crafted with stakeholders, should be clearly defined, and focused on learning (Murphy, 2007; NCREL, 1995). The function of a mission statement is to create a shared understanding and sense of purpose for the members of the school community, including administrators, teachers, other staff, students, their family members, and other community partners (Hatch, 2006, NCREL, 1995). High expectations must be evident (Bafile, 2007; Redding, 2006). Dr. Cile Chavez, former superintendent, says, "A mission can serve as a centerpiece...a framework for making decisions and for building relationships. Powerful missions give people a sense of purpose and passion" (Bafile, 2007, para. 2). Communication is vital; it is helpful if the mission statement is brief and easy to state and remember. "Above all, talk about it!" advises Chavez. "Host conversations whenever and wherever you can that are centered on the meaning of the mission statement" (Bafile, 2007, para. 12).

"A school–family compact is an opportunity to develop a clear, written agreement between parents and teachers about how they should work together. Compacts are required for Title I schools under No Child Left Behind and are a good idea for any school" (Henderson et al., 2007, p.198). Best practices indicate that a compact should focus on learning, including ways that parents can support their child's learning at home and opportunities for parents to communicate with the school to increase these supports (ADI, 2011; Henderson, Carson, Avallone, & Whipple, 2011; Henderson et al., 2007).

To ensure that the compact is understood by all parties involved, many parents and teachers will need new skills to bridge language, cultural, economic, and social barriers and to build trust relationships between home and school....The process involved in the development of the compact is its real strength. When parents and school officials sit down and discuss issues related to student success, parents are given a sense of voice and time to think about their responsibilities, while schools are given a strong starting point at developing and sustaining momentum around communicating with families and developing relationships. The compact must outline how parents, the entire school staff, and students will share the responsibility for improved student academic achievement. (Public Education Network, 2004, p. 2)

Homework is a primary point of interface between the school and the home, and parents are best able to support the school's purposes for homework when they understand what is expected of students and their role in monitoring their children's homework. Consistency from teacher to teacher and across grade levels and subjects, established by a homework policy, contributes to teachers', parents', and students' understanding of the school's purposes for homework and also reinforces students' formation of independent study habits (Redding, 2006). For the policy to be effective, those affected by it must be given assistance in carrying it out, actual practices must be monitored to detect and correct problems, and successes should be celebrated (ADI, 2011). For example, some schools allow the class with the highest homework completion rate for that quarter to have a party. Research indicates that "students learn best when homework is assigned regularly, graded, returned promptly, and used primarily to rehearse material first presented by the teacher at school" (Redding, 2000, p. 15). Studies of homework that included an interactive element requiring children to talk with someone at home about the

assignment have shown a variety of significant, positive outcomes, including improved student skills, increased parent involvement, and better teacher attitudes (Bennett-Conroy, 2012; Epstein, Simon, & Salinas, 1997; Van Voorhis, 2003).

Parents (who are not school staff) should be involved in creating a clear and constructive classroom visit policy (ADI, 2011; Henderson et al., 2007). This plan should balance the need to minimize classroom disruptions or interference with student learning, maximize safety, and also create a welcoming and transparent environment for families. It can be created with or in addition to policy guidelines for classroom volunteers. While all parents should be welcome to visit, inviting immigrant parents into the classroom may assist them in learning about teaching practices in American schools and ways they can support their children's achievement (Lim, 2012). The classroom visit policy offers an opportunity to reinforce the goals of the school community and each stakeholder's role in that community (Redding, 2011).

Questions to ask when creating a Classroom Visit Policy (ADI, 2011)

1. Is advance notice required? If so, how much in advance? Whom does the parent call to request a visit? Where does the visitor first report when entering the school?
2. How is the teacher notified?
3. What is the role of the parent when visiting? Where is the parent to sit? How much is the visitor to be involved?
4. What is the role of the teacher? Greeting. Explanation of what is going on in classroom.

While a procedure for visiting should be established to accommodate parents as needed, some schools have taken creative approaches to offering visit times. Redding (2000) suggests designating a time when teachers are available for walk-in conferences. For example, some schools set aside 30 minutes before school on certain days of the week when all teachers are available to parents, or provide classroom visit days when all parents are invited to school (see Henderson et al., 2007, p. 63).

Finally, any policy can only be effective if it is communicated clearly and frequently to everyone in the school community and implemented consistently. Teachers, front office and other support staff, and administrators may need professional development in providing a welcoming environment for parents and family members of students. However, the results of establishing the kind of environment that nurtures true partnership focused on student learning is worth the investment (Henderson et al., 2007; Redding, 2006, 2011; Redding et al., 2004). Open houses, family-school nights, and parent-teacher-student conferences can be prime venues for sharing information about policies affecting families and opportunities for two-way communication and parent involvement (HFRP, 2010; Redding, 2011).

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