



**Indicator:** The district includes parent organizations in district and school improvement planning and maintains regular communication with them. (5846)

**Explanation:** There is an abundance of research and resources on family engagement, but this indicator simply states that the district, through policy and practice, includes parent organizations in district and school improvement planning and maintains regular communication with them. This indicator is about outreach to parent organizations related to improvement planning and implementation.

**Questions:** At what points in the district and school improvement process are parent organizations given a window to the process and an opportunity to provide input? Is this done via district policy? Do parent organizations receive regular communication from the district (and their schools) about improvement progress? What information is given them?

A district intent on successful reform cultivates connections with parent organizations for the purpose of bridging the home and school environments. School leaders can have a strong impact on the priority placed on parental involvement within their schools and overall community (Protheroe, Shellard, & Turner, 2003). Recognition of this impact is incorporated in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) requiring school districts who receive federal funds to disseminate an annual district report card to parents and to guide parents toward being involved in their children's schools. "Just as no child should be left behind, so, too no parent should be left behind in the American educational enterprise" (Lapp & Flood, 2004, p.70). Although family involvement at the elementary level is prevalent, research has indicated a lack of family involvement at the middle and high school levels (Hiatt-Michael, 2001). Schools must consistently encourage parents to become involved in their children's learning at all grade levels. Respectful relationships and supportive links between schools, families, and communities are imperative to successful partnerships (Christenson, Godber, & Anderson, 2005). For example, Federal Way Public Schools, Washington, created a Family Partnership Office through which parents have greater access to the educational system and more opportunities to advocate for their children. A Family Partnership Advocate (FPA) coordinated district-wide family engagement activities. The FPA also participated in weekly meetings with assistant superintendents and the curriculum director to discuss the district's overall goals and strategies to enhance student learning (Westmoreland, Rosenberg, Lopez, & Weiss, 2009 p. 4).

Families have a profound impact on children's cognitive, social, and emotional development (Benson & Martin, 2003; Patrikakou, Weissberg, Redding, & Walberg, 2005). Teachers must realize that they are not only working with children, but also with their students' families (Kirschenbaum, 2001). District level programming designed to assist teachers who are building school and home bridges in the classroom will include appropriate funding, resources, and ongoing professional development and will be supported by administrators, unions, and school boards (Devlin-Scherer & Devlin-Scherer, 1994; Kirschenbaum, 2001). In collaboration with teachers and administrators, school psychologists (Pelco et al., 2000) and /or ombudsmen can foster positive family-school-community partnerships.

Teachers who are well prepared to work with students and families alike develop greater self-efficacy (Kirschenbaum, 2001).

Four broad features are suggested for the implementation of effective parent involvement programs (Darch, Miao, & Shippen, 2004). First, establish proactive programs to foster positive interactions with parents at the beginning of the school year. Second, focus on a 180-day plan which entails developing handouts for parents, offering parents a variety of opportunities to become actively involved, and taking families' interests into account while helping them plan for their children's transition into upcoming grade levels. Third, inform parents of classroom management and instructional activities. Fourth, make accommodations to meet the needs of families of diverse backgrounds. Practical strategies include: providing parents with information regarding parenting skills and child development; assisting families with increased knowledge of community resources (e.g., Internet access and suggesting significant websites); supporting teachers' efforts to plan optimal parent-teacher conferences (e.g., inclusion of extended family members, caregivers, and the students themselves); and participating in home visits to build partnerships between children's home and school environments (Pelco et al., 2000).

Some identifiable obstacles restricting parent involvement include: insufficient teacher education related to parent involvement management, limited time constraints of parents and teachers, parents' and teachers' diverse goals for children, parents' lack of knowledge about opportunities to serve as a classroom volunteer or advisory committee member, feelings of powerlessness in affecting change, and a lack of health (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991). In addition, teachers' attitudes, skills, and knowledge may also be considered barriers (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991). The process of eradicating barriers and obstacles will also examine whether school boards are exerting a positive influence on administrators to incorporate parent involvement programs (Devlin-Scherer & Devlin-Scherer, 1994).

In short, a district will minimize and alleviate barriers when its parent involvement practices, along with teachers' and administrators' self-efficacy, are directed toward children's education. In 2000, Maryland's Prince George's County School District established the Department of

Family and Community Outreach. This office monitors all family engagement activities across the district. This office created a professional development curriculum for new teachers that emphasizes the importance of the family-school connection. In addition, the DFCO devised training for principals and teachers that strengthens their ability to initiate and welcome home involvement (Westmoreland, Rosenberg, Lopez, & Weiss, 2009).

The book *Beyond the Bake Sale: the Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships* provides a sample district-level checklist entitled "How Well Does your District Support Family and Community Engagement?" The checklist incorporates 18 key aspects of parent engagement that should be examined in any assessment of the district/parent relationship. The 18 aspects are organized within 4 areas: district policy, high-level leadership involvement, district accountability, and support and resources. Each aspect is written as a statement, i.e., "The director of family and community engagement is an assistant superintendent or deputy superintendent and reports directly to the superintendent," and can be evaluated by choosing one option: "Already doing this Could do this easily, This will take time, This will be hard" (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007).

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See also: [www.schoolcommunitynetwork.org](http://www.schoolcommunitynetwork.org)

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