

Family/Parental Engagement Recommendation for the Colorado State Board of Education

SCEE Parent Engagement TAG Report December 8, 2010

Committee Members:

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Background

Education research over the past three decades has established a direct correlation between increased parent involvement and increased student achievement. One of the most comprehensive parent involvement studies done (encompassing more than 51 research studies and literature reviews) is *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement*. After reviewing a wide range of studies on parent involvement, Henderson and Mapp found that “students with involved parents, no matter what their income or background, were more likely to earn higher grades and test scores and enroll in higher-level programs; be promoted, pass their classes, and earn credits; attend school regularly; have better social skills, show improved behavior, and adapt well to school; and graduate and go on to postsecondary education.” Additionally, the study found, “Schools that succeed in engaging families from very diverse backgrounds share three practices:

- Focusing on building trusting collaborative relationships among teachers, families and community members,
- Recognizing, respecting, and addressing families’ needs and any class and cultural differences; and
- Embracing a philosophy of partnership where power and responsibility are shared”

Research also supports that the involvement of parents and families as true partners in the educational process is a more powerful education reform strategy than any other. One of the largest advocacy organizations for parents and teachers is the PTA. The National PTA was instrumental in advocating that the United States Department of

Education adopt a goal addressing parent involvement: “Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children” (<http://www.ed.gov/G2K/teachers/negs.html>).

Additionally, Title I, Part A of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, requires that each local school system and school receiving Title I funds have a parent involvement policy. Policies must be jointly developed with, approved by, and distributed to parents. Each Title I school’s policy must be a part of its Title I plan and include a description of how the school will implement specific components of the law (Title I as a Tool for Parent Involvement, Center for Law in Education). It is the belief of the SCEE Parent Engagement TAG Group that all schools should be held to many of the same standards and requirements outlined in the No Child Left Behind Act and required of all schools receiving Title I funds. In order to achieve this, it takes a paradigm shift in our thinking about policy to ensure all parents have meaningful opportunities to participate in their child’s education and that all school staff members are provided the appropriate training necessary to work with parents as true partners.

Some schools and most local school systems in Colorado have family involvement coordinators or liaisons. Their role is to ensure that parent involvement opportunities are occurring and activities are being implemented, however in most cases, the current climate of school and parent involvement have the parent liaisons “putting out fires” with a reactive approach instead of a proactive approach.

Recommendations

In 2001, The Maryland Parent Advisory Council adopted one of the most inclusive parent involvement policies in the country and the Fall of 2003 the Council convened again to strengthen the policy to emphasize the need for an organizational structure at the state, school system, and school levels – that supports family and community involvement. The organizational structure the Council recommended is supported by National PTA standards to increase parental involvement in education and by the Six Types of Family Involvement Framework by Dr Joyce Epstein, Director of the National Network of Partnership Schools and the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at John Hopkins University. M-PAC believed that without state, local and school level organizational structures, Maryland would not see any real change in parental involvement.

At the end of two years of research, the M-PAC recommendations were vetted through a series of public forums held in all 24 local school systems, then the final report *A Shared Responsibility* was approved by the Maryland State Board of education.

After reviewing the recommendations and research of M-PAC, the SCEE Parental Engagement TAG Group thought it would serve as a great resource for recommendations for the Colorado State Board of Education. Given the fact the M-PAC research validates the National PTA Standards and takes it to the level of the organizational structure of our education system as a whole, Colorado could benefit from over 4 years of work, including the research, invested in these recommendations. Thus the following recommendations reflect a lot of the content of *A Shared Responsibility* with additions and adjustments to reflect the state of Colorado.

These recommendations are presented in five themes: communication, leadership, training, partnership, and accountability. The purpose of the categorization was to provide structure to the recommendations. It is important to note that the recommendations are not prioritized. Each recommendation builds on the other, thereby resisting attempts at ranking.

I. Communication

Rationale

Clear, regular, two-way communication is the number one determination of successful school-home partnerships. If schools seek to increase involvement, they must communicate to families and communities their rights and responsibilities and how they can support schools. Likewise, families and communities contribute to school improvement by providing feedback on – or directly shaping – policies, programs, student achievement, and more.

Communicating clearly and regularly takes time and careful planning. The task becomes even more challenging when one considers the diversity of Colorado families. **More than 130 languages are spoken in the largest school district of the state. All over Colorado students hail from varied racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds.** Family structure and characteristics vary as well—two-parent, single-parent, and no-parent families, military families, single-income or dual-income families, families with step-parents and step-siblings, the list goes on. Educators are faced with the monumental task of communicating effectively with an amazingly diverse group of people.

The following recommendations take such diversity into account and support clear, regular, two-way communication between schools, families, and communities.

Recommendations

To improve parents' ability to be involved in schools, the Colorado Department of Education should...

- Communicate — using varied methods, media, resources, and languages — the rights and responsibilities of parents to develop and respond to education policy, procedures, and practices at the state, local school system, and school levels.

local school systems and schools should...

- Hold regular, meaningful parent/teacher conferences that address the full range of issues affecting student achievement.
- Using varied methods, media, and languages, regularly provide parents information on their rights and responsibilities, on grading and discipline policies, and on the importance of meaningful parent involvement.
- Using varied methods, media, and languages, provide parents curriculum and program information by grade and suggest steps for improving individual student achievement. A committee of parents and educators should review the information to ensure that it is understandable to all parents.

II. Leadership

Rationale

Strong leadership is essential for any major reform effort. Subcommittee members agreed on the importance of leadership at the state, district, school, parent, and community levels. A critical part of leadership, group members decided, is ensuring the necessary processes and organizational structure are in place to involve all stakeholders. After all, there are already some strong parent involvement policies in place across the state through Title I requirements. What is somewhat lacking, is the proper implementation, monitoring and tracking the success of such policies. This could be improved with more defined processes, with more structures encouraging and modeling of family involvement initiatives from the State and local school systems.

Hence, the following recommendations are designed to create leadership opportunities and to build an organizational structure to support family involvement. Implementing these recommendations will be a strong show of leadership for the State and local school systems.

Recommendations

To build the leadership and organizational structure necessary to support family and community involvement in schools, the **Colorado State Board of Education and/or Colorado State Department of Education should ...**

- Initiate and/or support legislation that would place at least two parents with a child attending a **Colorado public school on the State Board of Education.**
- Ensure the establishment of an organizational structure that includes personnel at the state, local school system, and school levels. This structure will oversee leadership, training, monitoring, and support for family and community involvement and partnerships.
- Encourage local school systems to establish parent involvement advisory groups to advise their local boards of education on parent involvement concerns, practices, and research. These groups would also communicate board policies, parent involvement strategies, and research to parents and communities.
- Provide parents with information regarding education leadership roles and responsibilities in the current state education system and how to effectively communicate through this system to address any concerns or issues.

III. Training

Rationale

If teachers and other educators are expected to facilitate relationships and partnerships with the family/community, then they must understand communication and involvement strategies. Specific, ongoing training is required to build this understanding. Likewise, parents and other stakeholders require training to become full partners. They need to learn how to contribute to school improvement teams, how to advocate for children, how to help individual students academically, and more. Again as with communication outreach, training parents becomes even more challenging

when one considers the many the languages spoken by parents of students in the Colorado school system.

Since children spend 70% of their time out of school and with their families, it is important that parents receive guidance on how to support their children at home. For the same reason, parents have a plethora of information about their children and can serve as an “education advisor” to their teachers as well. According to Family Engagement expert Joyce Epstein, the parent’s role in supporting learning at home provides the foundation for early a child’s early learning and the springboard for his/her academic success. Supporting learning at home should continue throughout a student’s academic career.

Recommendations

To increase the amount and effectiveness of family and community involvement in schools, the Colorado State Department of Education should...

- Assess local school systems’ parent and community involvement training needs, and then provide school systems appropriate technical assistance, training, resources, and mentoring.
- Encourage local school systems to include family and community involvement measures in their local assessment of training needs.
- Work with local school systems, colleges, and universities to develop and offer coursework on family involvement for new and current teachers, administrators, and other school staff.
- Work with colleges and universities to develop a course in parent and community involvement that is a requirement for all undergraduate education students seeking teaching certification in Colorado.
- Have available training programs and resources for educators specifically designed to help them with assisting parents to facilitate learning at home that is tied to classroom instruction in academic courses.

the **Colorado State Board of Education** should...

- Encourage local boards of education to support parent and community involvement training school-based staff, teachers, administrators, parents, and community members.

local school systems should...

- Provide or ensure that schools provide job-embedded staff training that addresses issues related to individual student needs, family advocacy, cultural proficiency, and — to ensure a family-friendly atmosphere in the school — parent involvement and customer service skills.

- Provide or ensure that schools provide training for parents and community members on leadership and effective involvement with schools. To maximize access to training, it should be offered at schools, at additional sites that are convenient to the community, and on the Web.
- Provide or ensure that parents are trained on their rights and responsibilities

IV. Partnership

Rationale

Some children and families have unmet health and welfare needs that serve as barriers to achievement. Working together, schools, families, and communities can remove such barriers and set the stage for accelerated academic achievement.

Home-school-community collaborations, however, are more than supportive services or mentoring programs—though these are invaluable. True partnerships involve mutual respect, two-way communication, shared decision-making, and shared accountability. The recommendations presented here are designed to support strong partnerships among Colorado families, schools, and communities.

Recommendations

To encourage and support schools' partnerships with families and communities, the Colorado State Department of Education should...

- Encourage all committees and task forces at the state, local school system, and school levels to offer an opportunity for participation to at least two parents (or 25% of the membership) with a child attending a Colorado public school.
- Encourage public schools to collaborate with community agencies to provide in schools such services as wellness centers, health care (physical and mental), social services, and childcare.
- Develop programs and incentives for more effective communication and partnerships (parent and community, including businesses) at the state, local school system, and school levels.

V. Accountability

Rationale

Modern families and school staffs have strict time constraints and multiple priorities. To make sure involvement does not get lost in the shuffle, accountability measures are necessary. We often “treasure what we measure and what we measure get our attention”.

This call for accountability was accompanied by an admission that involvement is not the responsibility of educators alone. Rather, it is a responsibility shared among schools, families, and communities. Accountability measures are useful tools in improving student achievement, but that they should not be used or perceived as a means of placing blame on any particular group or person. Accordingly, several recommendations (some required, some encouraged) are suggested to change attitudes and actions. These accountability recommendations will help move away from the notion of family involvement as an “add-on” and toward the acceptance of involvement as a valuable, essential strategy to improve student achievement.

Recommendations

To guide and measure the quality of schools' parent involvement policies and initiatives, benchmarks and an assessment tool must be designed. The National Parent Teacher Association and the National Network of Partnership Schools at Johns Hopkins University developed a tool to measure parent involvement effectiveness. These existing assessment tools can be used as a model for local school systems and schools as they work to make parents true partners in their children's education. Leadership must be provided from the Colorado Department of Education to ensure that policies are fully implemented and focused on meeting the needs of parents and the school community.

In additional Title I monitoring should be enhanced to include all schools with a strong emphasis on supporting parents with the academic success of their students. Currently schools put more emphasis on parents volunteering time and fundraising and use those activities to measure “parent engagement”. These activities do not directly impact student achievement.

Although there is some monitoring of parental engagement in Colorado schools and districts tied to laws and requirements, it is currently based on “random acts of engagement.” These “random acts” are used in isolation of each other or separate from an organized framework in which the activities for family engagement should be planned and linked to the school's improvement plans and other school goals. Random activities are difficult to measure and if they are not linked to children's learning, the outcomes can show increased numbers of participation, but the effectiveness of individual events are not measurable over time.

To support and measure the effectiveness of family and community involvement in schools, the **Colorado State Board of Education and/or Colorado State Department of Education** should...

- Adopt a Family Involvement Policy Resolution similar to that of the Maryland State Board of Education into the Code of Colorado Regulations. Require local school systems develop family involvement policies aligned with the state regulation.
- Develop a set of survey questions — that could stand alone or be incorporated into existing local school system survey instruments — to assess annually the effectiveness of parent and community involvement policies and practices. Input from local school systems and advocacy and community groups must be sought in the development of the survey. This survey information should be used to design and modify parent/family involvement activities detailed in each local school system’s Master Plan and annual update.
- Establish benchmarks — in collaboration with local systems and advocacy and community groups — for local school systems and schools to use in measuring the effectiveness and progress of their parent and community involvement policies and practices. Once these benchmarks are established, progress should be reported in the **Colorado School Performance Report**.
- Encourage local school systems to factor parent and family involvement into the annual performance evaluations of school administrators and staff
- Provide resources and templates that are designed to effectively measure and/or track teachers partnerships with parents as it relates to assisting children with their academic success in the classroom
- Require transparency in the monitoring of parental engagement and results for public review

Summary

When parents, families, educators, and community members view themselves as mutually accountable for improving student achievement, they can work together as real partners and have a tremendous affect on education reform. Gaining the knowledge, skills, resources and confidence to succeed is key to the success of these partnerships. National standards and policies are already in place to provide directions and insight on how to do this work. More than enough research states that parental engagement cannot be ignored when addressing education reform and closing the achievement gap. Full implementation of these recommendations is fundamental if Colorado is to increase the quantity and quality of family and community involvement in public schools.

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MARYLAND FAMILY INVOLVEMENT POLICY

The Maryland State Board of Education adopted this policy as a resolution on October 30, 2001.

WHEREAS, the Maryland State Board of Education recognizes that parents and families are a young child's first teachers, and that when children enter school the responsibility for their education is then shared with the school and the entire community; and

WHEREAS, the Maryland State Board of Education recognizes that creating positive home, school, and community partnerships is essential to carrying out this shared responsibility successfully; and

WHEREAS, the Maryland State Board of Education recognizes that in order to accomplish the mission of Maryland's schools to successfully educate all students, the community, schools, parents, and students must work as knowledgeable partners;

NOW THEREFORE, the Maryland State Board of Education adopts this policy statement for key stakeholders in ensuring quality education for all students:

The State Board believes that schools must create an environment that is conducive to learning and supports strong comprehensive family involvement programs. Schools will strive to involve parents and family members of children at all ages and grade levels by providing and respecting a variety of types and degrees of involvement, while recognizing the diverse needs of families in their community. Schools will inform and involve parents and caregivers in children's learning activities and academic decisions at home and in school. Further, schools will establish high levels of cooperation and coordination with other community agencies that provide services to children and families.

Parents and other family members are the child's first teachers. They will be encouraged to provide a home atmosphere conducive to learning and express to their children the importance of education. Further, parents and family members will be expected to cooperate with teachers and school administrators in matters relating to their child's education and will be encouraged to participate meaningfully in school programs, program planning, and decision making. Schools also need the support of other members of the community, including parent organizations, public libraries, businesses, and faith-based organizations to promote effective education. Community groups will be helped to recognize that investment in education is investment in the community. Further,

community groups will be encouraged to help schools develop and implement innovative programs that promote educational goals and support high academic expectations for all students.

The Maryland State Department of Education has the role of fostering wider and more substantive family and community involvement by identifying and sharing information with parents and families about effective educational programs. It will also provide information on funding sources for the development, implementation, and evaluation of programs. Further, it will develop professional development programs on family/school/community involvement for school staff and families. The Maryland State Department of Education will develop programs that nurture and support parents/families by enhancing their parenting skills and encouraging them to provide academic assistance to their children. Special efforts will be made to reach those who did not have a positive school experience or for whom English is not their native language.

The Maryland State Board of Education and the Maryland Department of Education will continue to support and assist schools and local school systems in developing, implementing, and evaluating policies and programs that involve all parents and families at all grade levels. It will seek to collaborate with faith-based organizations and other community agencies serving children and families to encourage parent and family involvement in the lives of children.

Full Council Response to Recommendations

Strengths of Recommendations	Areas of Needed Improvement	Red Flags (I can't live with or live without...)

Open Conversation Notes

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Straw Poll Response to 1st Read

Council Member	Rating (1-4)	Council Member	Rating (1-4)
Amie Baca-Oehlert		Nina Lopez	
Jo Ann Baxter		Colin Mullaney	
William Bregar		Lorrie Shepard	
Margaret Crespo		Brenda Smith	
Kerrie Dallman		Matt Smith	
Tracy Dorland		Sandra Smyser	
Shelby Gonzales-Parker		(Shelly Genereux)	
Towanna Henderson			

Working Group Next Steps/Revisions Before 2nd Read

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