HOME-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS
What are family-school partnerships?

Family-school partnerships are collaborative relationships and activities involving school staff, parents and family members of students at a school. Effective partnerships are based on mutual trust and respect, and shared responsibility for the education of the children at the school.

WHAT ARE HOME - SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS?
THE AIM OF HOME SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

...encourage sustainable and effective partnerships between all members of the school community, parents and families, and students. These partnerships should:

- view each partner as making equally valuable contributions;
- respect student needs and preferences;
- address barriers to involvement in schools by families;
THE AIM OF HOME SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS, CONT.

- create better programs, opportunities and learning for students;
- give parents and families appropriate opportunities to contribute to school decision-making.
All families and schools want the best for their children.
All children have the right to the opportunity to reach their full potential.
Parents and families are the first and continuing educators of their children.
Effective schools provide a nurturing and supportive learning environment.
Families and schools value quality teaching and respect teachers’ professional expertise.
Families and schools value the diversity of families and use this as a resource for building partnerships and communities.

Family-school partnerships are based on mutual responsibility, respect and trust.

Leadership is critical to building, maintaining and renewing partnerships.

Family-school partnerships improve student motivation and learning.

Family-school partnerships strengthen the connections between schools and their communities.
In order to create the conditions that enable effective family-school partnerships to be developed and sustained, the following supporting structures should be in place:

- family-school advisory team/committee to plan, organize, implement and evaluate partnerships;
- school policies and procedures which explicitly state and clearly integrate the principles and practices of effective partnerships; *(Could be addressed in District and/or Campus Improvement Plans OR in the District and/or School Parent and Family Engagement Policies)*
SUPPORTING STRUCTURES, CONT.

- support networks, to enable school communities to share ideas, issues and best practice; and
- accountability to the community, to report on successes and drive improvement in partnerships.

(Additional information could be reported along with the Annual District/School Report Card)
Any successful partnership will involve parents and families, and caregivers in preparation, planning, implementation and review. To increase the likelihood for effective home-school partnerships, a dedicated family-school advisory team/committee made up of teachers, school leaders and parents to develop and coordinate partnership plans and activities can provide the basis for improving partnerships more broadly.

*(A Building Capacity option, PL 114-95 Section 1116 (e) (12) establish a districtwide parent advisory council...)*
KEY DIMENSIONS OF FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

1. Communicating;
2. Connecting learning at home and at school;
3. Building community and identity;
4. Recognizing the role of the family;
5. Consultative decision-making;
6. Collaborating beyond the school; and
7. Participating.
This key dimension emphasizes that effective communication:

- Is active, personal, frequent and culturally appropriate;
- is where schools go out of their way to make parents and families feel welcome and valued;
- is a two-way exchange;
- involves not only an exchange of information, but also an opportunity for schools and families to learn about each other;
makes clear that parents and families are genuine partners and can help solve big problems;
builds bridges across cultural and language divides including actively seeking access to these families;
is open to families’ needs and attitudes;
acknowledges and celebrates the families’ input;
is multi-dimensional – it may:
- be formal or informal,
- happen in different places;
- use different methods.
Home-school communication needs to be taken seriously and must be valued, recognized, and rewarded by schools. It is essential to provide staff with education and training programs to prepare them to communicate effectively with families in an approachable manner.

It is equally important to empower and encourage parents and families to communicate effectively with schools.
2. CONNECTING LEARNING AT HOME AND AT SCHOOL

This key dimension emphasizes:

- understanding by families and schools of the overlap between the home and school environments;
- the connection between successful partnerships and the child’s learning, including the importance of high expectations from both teachers and parents to the child’s success at school;
- families and schools working together to create positive attitudes toward learning in each child;
ensuring parents and families are informed about and understand their child’s progress;
families and schools valuing and using the skills and knowledge children bring both from the home to the school and from the school to the home;
families and schools recognize and use learning opportunities in the home environment;
3. BUILDING COMMUNITY AND IDENTITY

This key dimension emphasizes:

- activities that improve the quality of life in a community while honoring the culture, traditions, values and relationships in that community.

- activities that shape students’ sense of identity and culture, schools can build a sense of community in each student.

- schools can act as a focal point for communities to come together and engage in capacity-building.
Families and schools can reach mutual understanding of each other’s roles and priorities in partnerships by:

- exploring the nature of parent and family’s role in the education of children to develop mutual understanding;
- offering strategies for family support and encouragement of children’s learning at school;
- organizing workshops/discussions/meetings and demonstrations around areas such as literacy and math, home and classroom work, raising resilience and confidence in young people;
ensuring parents and families understand school goals;
ensuring schools understand parent, family, and community priorities;
establishing an environment where schools show leadership which is visible and available;
helping schools become a place that parents and families can call their own, which includes creating real roles for parents who come into the school; and
developing skills, such as communication, collaboration and conflict management.
This key dimension emphasizes that as primary educators of their children, parents and families have a lasting influence on their children’s attitudes and achievements at school. They can encourage their children’s learning in and out of school and are also in a position to support school goals, directions and ethos.
5. CONSULTATIVE DECISION-MAKING

This key dimension emphasizes:

- parents and families are entitled to be consulted and participate in decisions concerning their own children;
- parents and families can play meaningful roles in the school decision-making processes. Training and information to make the most of those opportunities can be provided as part of the partnership activities.
An inclusive approach to school decision-making and parental involvement creates a sense of shared responsibility among parents, community members, teachers and school leaders. In turn, shared responsibility:

- ensures that parents’ values and interests are heard and respected;
- makes the school more accountable to its community; and
- ensures that the values and opinions of parents and families are sought outside the formal school structures.
6. COLLABORATING BEYOND THE SCHOOL

- This key dimension emphasizes identifying, locating and integrating community resources.
- The wider community provides services which can strengthen and support schools, students and their families.
- Schools, families and students can assist the community in return.

Schools are increasingly collaborating with partners such as:
- local businesses;
- after-school care providers;
- higher education;
- foundations; and
- other community-based agencies.
This key dimension emphasizes that families’ time, energy and expertise can support learning and school programs in many ways. This may involve parent and family members:

- working with students on learning activities in classrooms;
- participating in other school activities outside the classroom; or
- participating in activities outside the school itself; and
- supporting and valuing teachers.
Parents and families participate in the school in a wide variety of ways and **all contributions are valuable**. Participation may involve families having the opportunity to do something that interests them and including activities that are not directly education-related.
SUGGESTED STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS

As a first step in developing quality partnership programs, schools are encouraged to identify a person or a “Partnerships Leadership Team” to oversee and coordinate their work with parents and families, and to connect with the parent body in their system.
EXAMPLES

- Review or develop a policy on family-school partnerships. *(Could be addressed in District and/or School Parental Involvement Policies)*
- Write an annual Action Plan for partnerships. *(Could be addressed in District and/or Campus Improvement Plans)*
- Provide resource materials to assist schools with partnership programs.
- Establish a clearinghouse of information on best practices and research findings.
EXAMPLES

- Conduct workshops to encourage the exchange of good practices and solutions to challenges in implementing partnership programs. *(Try a ParentCamp)*
- Work with universities to prepare new teachers to conduct effective partnerships.
- Celebrate and recognize excellent partnerships in schools.
- Work with businesses to establish flexible leave policies so parents can attend activities at their children’s schools.
Examples

- Identify a budget for partnership activities in schools. *(Could be part of the 1% set-aside, reservation of funds, PL 114-95 Section 1116 (a) (3))*

- Provide training for staff to increase their partnership skills. *(Building Capacity requirement, PL 114-95 Section 1116 (e) (3), shall educate teachers, pupil services personnel, principals…)*

- Publicize family-school partnership activities. *(Building Capacity requirement, PL 114-95 Section 1116 (e) (5), shall ensure that information related to school and parent programs…)*

- Explicitly seek and value the input of families.

- Maintain outreach and sustainability.
RESOURCES

  - Illinois State Board of Education, College and Career Readiness, Comprehensive System of Learning Supports

  - Australian Government, Department of Education, Family-School Partnerships Framework (Ideas from this document were used in developing this PowerPoint)
CONTACT INFORMATION

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