

National Standards for Parent and Family Involvement Programs

Standards identified by the National PTA build on six types of parent involvement identified by Joyce L. Epstein of the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University (1995). Each standard produces unique gains for students, contributes to effective programs, and fosters school success. Gains for students are greatest when parents participate in activities in each of the six standard areas. (National PTA, 1997).

- Standard I: Communicating - Communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful.
- Standard II: Parenting - Parenting skills are promoted and supported.
- Standard III: Student Learning - Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.
- Standard IV: Volunteering - Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought.
- Standard V: School Decision Making and Advocacy - Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families.
- Standard VI: Collaborating with Community - Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families, and student learning.

Standard I - Communicating

Communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful.

Communication is the foundation of a solid partnership. When parents and educators communicate effectively, positive relationships develop, problems are more easily solved, and students make greater progress.

Too often school or program communication is one-way without the chance to exchange ideas and share perceptions. Effective home-school communication is the two-way sharing of information vital to student success. Even parent-teacher conferences can be one-way if the goal is merely reporting student progress. Partnering requires give-and-take conversation, goal setting for the future, and regular follow-up interactions.

Quality Indicators of Successful Programs

1. Use a variety of communication tools on a regular basis, seeking to facilitate two-way interaction through each type of medium.
2. Establish opportunities for parents and educators to share partnering information such as student strengths and learning preferences.
3. Provide clear information regarding course expectations and offerings, student placement, school activities, student services, and optional programs.
4. Mail report cards and regular progress reports to parents. Provide support services and follow-up conferences as needed.
5. Disseminate information on school reforms, policies, discipline procedures, assessment tools, and school goals, and include parents in any related decision-making process.
6. Conduct conferences with parents at least twice a year, with follow-up as needed. These should accommodate the varied schedules of parents, language barriers, and the need for child care.

7. Encourage immediate contact between parents and teachers when concerns arise.
8. Distribute student work for parental comment and review on a regular basis.
9. Translate communications to assist non-English-speaking parents.
10. Communicate with parents regarding positive student behavior and achievement, not just regarding misbehavior or failure.
11. Provide opportunities for parents to communicate with principals and other administrative staff.
12. Promote informal activities at which parents, staff, and community members can interact.
13. Provide staff development regarding effective communication techniques and the importance of regular two-way communication between the school and the family.

Standard II - Parenting

Parenting skills are promoted and supported.

Parents are a child's life support system. Consequently, the most important support a child can receive comes from the home.

School personnel and program staff support positive parenting by respecting and affirming the strengths and skills needed by parents to fulfill their role. From making sure that students arrive at school rested, fed, and ready to learn, to setting high learning expectations and nurturing self-esteem, parents sustain their children's learning.

When staff members recognize parent roles and responsibilities, ask parents what supports they need, and work to find ways to meet those needs, they communicate a clear message to parents: "We value you and need your input" in order to maintain a high-quality program.

Quality Indicators of Successful Programs

1. Communicate the importance of positive relationships between parents and their children.
2. Link parents to programs and resources within the community that provide support services to families.
3. Reach out to all families, not just those who attend parent meetings.
4. Establish policies that support and respect family responsibilities, recognizing the variety of parenting traditions and practices within the community's cultural and religious diversity.
5. Provide an accessible parent/family information and resource center to support parents and families with training, resources, and other services.
6. Encourage staff members to demonstrate respect for families and the family's primary role in the rearing of children to become responsible adults.

Standard III - Student Learning

Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.

Student learning increases when parents are invited into the process by helping at home.

Enlisting parents' involvement provides educators and administrators with a valuable support system--creating a team that is working for each child's success.

The vast majority of parents are willing to assist their students in learning, but many times are not sure what assistance is most helpful and appropriate. Helping parents connect to their children's learning enables parents to communicate in powerful ways that they value what their

children achieve. Whether it's working together on a computer, displaying student work at home, or responding to a particular class assignment, parents' actions communicate to their children that education is important.

Quality Indicators of Successful Programs

1. Seek and encourage parental participation in decision-making that affects students.
2. Inform parents of the expectations for students in each subject at each grade level.
3. Provide information regarding how parents can foster learning at home, give appropriate assistance, monitor homework, and give feedback to teachers.
4. Regularly assign interactive homework that will require students to discuss and interact with their parents about what they are learning in class.
5. Sponsor workshops or distribute information to assist parents in understanding how students can improve skills, get help when needed, meet class expectations, and perform well on assessments.
6. Involve parents in setting student goals each year and in planning for post-secondary education and careers. Encourage the development of a personalized education plan for each student, where parents are full partners.
7. Provide opportunities for staff members to learn and share successful approaches to engaging parents in their child's education.

Standard IV - Volunteering

Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought.

When parents volunteer, both families and schools reap benefits that come in few other ways.

Literally millions of dollars of volunteer services are performed by parents and family members each year in the public schools. Studies have concluded that volunteers express greater confidence in the schools where they have opportunities to participate regularly. In addition, assisting in school or program events/activities communicates to a child, "I care about what you do here."

In order for parents to feel appreciated and welcome, volunteer work must be meaningful and valuable to them. Capitalizing on the expertise and skills of parents and family members provides much needed support to educators and administrators already taxed in their attempts to meet academic goals and student needs.

Although there are many parents for whom volunteering during school hours is not possible, creative solutions like before- or after-school "drop-in" programs or "at home" support activities provide opportunities for parents to offer their assistance as well.

Quality Indicators of Successful Programs

1. Ensure that office staff greetings, signage near the entrances, and any other interaction with parents create a climate in which parents feel valued and welcome.
2. Survey parents regarding their interests, talents, and availability, then coordinate the parent resources with those that exist within the school and among the faculty.
3. Ensure that parents who are unable to volunteer in the school building are given the options for helping in other ways, at home or place of employment.

4. Organize an easy, accessible program for utilizing parent volunteers, providing ample training on volunteer procedures and school protocol.
5. Develop a system for contacting all parents to assist as the year progresses.
6. Design opportunities for those with limited time and resources to participate by addressing child care, transportation, work schedule needs, and so forth.
7. Show appreciation for parents' participation, and value their diverse contributions.
8. Educate and assist staff members in creating an inviting climate and effectively utilizing volunteer resources.
9. Ensure that volunteer activities are meaningful and built on volunteer interests and abilities.

Standard V – School Decision-Making and Advocacy

Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families.

Studies have shown that schools where parents are involved in decision making and advocacy have higher levels of student achievement and greater public support.

Effective partnerships develop when each partner is respected and empowered to fully participate in the decision-making process. Schools and programs that actively enlist parent participation and input communicate that parents are valued as full partners in the educating of their children.

Parents and educators depend on shared authority in decision-making systems to foster parental trust, public confidence, and mutual support of each other's efforts in helping students succeed. The involvement of parents, as individuals or as representative of others, is crucial in collaborative decision-making processes on issues from curriculum and course selection, to discipline policies and over-all school reform measures.

Quality Indicators of Successful Programs

1. Provide understandable, accessible, and well-publicized processes for influencing decisions, raising issues or concerns, appealing decisions, and resolving problems.
2. Encourage the formation of PTAs or other parent groups to identify and respond to issues of interest to parents.
3. Include parents on all decision-making and advisory committees, and ensure adequate training for such areas as policy, curriculum, budget, school reform initiatives, safety, and personnel. Where site governance bodies exist, give equal representation to parents.
4. Provide parents with current information regarding school policies, practices, and both student and school performance data.
5. Enable parents to participate as partners when setting school goals, developing or evaluating programs and policies, or responding to performance data.
6. Encourage and facilitate active parent participation in the decisions that affect students, such as student placement, course selection, and individual personalized education plans.
7. Treat parental concerns with respect and demonstrate genuine interest in developing solutions.
8. Promote parent participation on school district, state, and national committees and issues.
9. Provide training for staff and parents on collaborative partnering and shared decision making.

Standard VI - Collaborating with Community

Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families, and student learning.

As part of the larger community, schools and other programs fulfill important community goals. In like fashion, communities offer a wide array of resources valuable to schools and the families they serve.

When schools and communities work together, both are strengthened in synergistic ways and make gains that outpace what either entity could accomplish on its own:

- Families access community resources more easily;
- Businesses connect education programs with the realities of the workplace;
- Seniors contribute wisdom and gain a greater sense of purpose; and ultimately,
- Students serve and learn beyond their school involvement.

The best partnerships are mutually beneficial and structured to connect individuals, not just institutions or groups. This connection enables the power of community partnerships to be unleashed.

Quality Indicators of Successful Programs

1. Distribute information regarding cultural, recreational, academic, health, social, and other resources that serve families within the community.
2. Develop partnerships with local business and service groups to advance student learning and assist schools and families.
3. Encourage employers to adopt policies and practices that promote and support adult participation in children's education.
4. Foster student participation in community service.
5. Involve community members in school volunteer programs.
6. Disseminate information to the school community, including those without school-age children, regarding school programs and performance.
7. Collaborate with community agencies to provide family support services and adult learning opportunities, enabling parents to more fully participate in activities that support education.
8. Inform staff members of the resources available in the community and strategies for utilizing those resources.

Source: National PTA

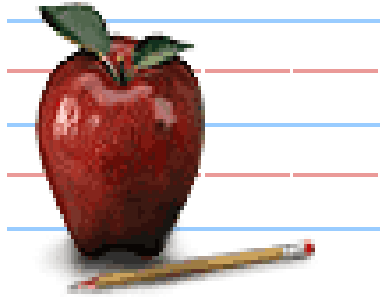
Getting Involved in Your Child's School

While the heart of public education is what takes place in the classroom with teachers teaching students, the key to any child's success is the support received not only from teachers and staff, but also from parents and family members at home.

Below are tips for parents, grandparents, extended family members and business owners to become engaged in public education and help students achieve.

Promote reading and literacy:

- ✓ Read to and with your child daily—20 minutes a day is all it takes.
- ✓ Spread reading activities out over the day. For example, read the newspaper out loud in the morning or read a recipe together when preparing a meal.



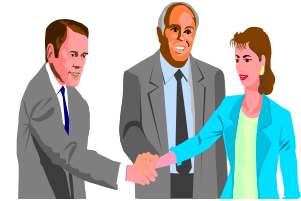
- ✓ Read favorite books over and over again.
- ✓ Have books readily available. Set up places in your home with reading and writing materials.
- ✓ Take advantage of everyday tasks as tools to promote reading and writing. Write simple notes and letters to each other or prepare the grocery list together.
- ✓ Make regular visits to your public library. Get library cards for your children and let them select their own books.
- ✓ Model good reading habits. Be sure your children see you reading and writing.
- ✓ Have regular discussions with your children and encourage them to share their ideas.

Further use and advancement of technology:

- ✓ Explore options for the use of technology in your child's school and in the home. Can you visit your child's school while students are using the computers? Does your school or public library provide access to computer labs after school and on weekends?
- ✓ If you have a computer in your home, set time aside for family members – especially students – to use the computer. If you have modem access, explore Internet sites with your child to make use of the Internet for completing homework assignments, reports and special projects.
- ✓ If you are a computer literate parent, offer to work with other parents and students who want to learn more about technology.
- ✓ If you're a business owner, establish computer donation and computer upgrading programs for schools and families or simply donate used computers to schools.

Promote career awareness in your child and in the local school:

- ✓ Encourage the exploration of potential career fields, as well as the skills and education needed to enter those fields.
- ✓ Expose students to career possibilities through contacts with teachers, friends, employers and counselors.
- ✓ Take your child to work.



- ✓ Participate in your child's education and urge him/her to take college prep and career pathway courses, student shadowing and intern opportunities and career counseling.
- ✓ Encourage business employees to serve as mentors to help introduce students to various careers.
- ✓ Set up opportunities for students and teachers to shadow employees to learn about jobs and apply learning and teaching to real world situations.
- ✓ Assist in forming strong partnerships between businesses and high schools to provide experience, apprenticeships and internships for students.



Increase student and school safety:

- ✓ Talk to children about the dangers of alcohol, tobacco and drug use. These discussions could save their lives.
- ✓ Meet with the PTA and other parents to form a "parent patrol" to work in and around schools to discourage alcohol and drug abuse, and unwanted intruders.



- ✓ Make "parental presence" a given at school-sponsored sporting events, dances, skating parties and other student-based activities. This leads to increased parent involvement in school activities and improved student behavior at events.
- ✓ Communicate positive values/character, such as respect, honesty, hard work and responsibility.
- ✓ See that your child is involved in after school activities, like performing arts, academic clubs, sports, community opportunities and other positive activities beyond the traditional school day.
- ✓ Get to know the families of your children's friends.
- ✓ Become familiar with school policies and issues.
- ✓ Work with owners of businesses in the school neighborhood to create safe corridors for children on their way to and from school. Encourage the businesses to extend their place of business beyond their doors.

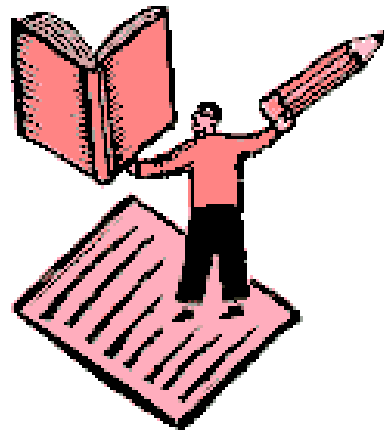
Strengthen school – community interaction and communication:

- ✓ Be involved in your public schools; it's an investment in your future.
- ✓ Volunteer to sit on school planning and decision-making committees.

- ✓ Participate in the school PTA.
- ✓ Attend back-to-school activities and parent-teacher conferences.
- ✓ Communicate with your child's teacher on a regular basis.
- ✓ Keep up-to-date on your child's and school's activities. Read school policies, newsletters and correspondence.

Strengthen student academic achievement:

- ✓ Encourage your child to study hard.
- ✓ Set aside regular hours for homework and study time.
- ✓ Talk with your child's teacher and principal about the assessment tools used to track student progress. This will help you understand more clearly the areas on which your child is being tested, and what he/she should know.
- ✓ Observe your child's performance at school and ask for ways in which you can be involved.
- ✓ Set high standards and expectations for your child.



Getting Involved in Your Child's School



Dallas Independent School District

Volunteering in Your Child's School

Kenneth Shore

In most districts parents have the opportunity to volunteer in some capacity in their child's school. Volunteering need not require a large commitment of time. The concept of quality time applies to volunteering just as it does to parenting. Your involvement might range from a one-time only basis to a once-a-day basis. Consider whether you have special skills that the school can use. The chart below lists various opportunities for volunteering in school.

If you are interested in volunteering, give the principal a call. She may recommend opportunities for helping out in school or may suggest that you talk with the teacher directly about assisting in the classroom. If your school district has a volunteer coordinator, you may need to go through her to try to match your skills and interests with the school's needs.

A few words about volunteering protocol. Do not overextend yourself. Make sure that you are able to be there when you say you can. The school will be relying on you to show up. If you are assigned to a classroom, remember that you are there to assist the teacher, so take your cues from her. It may take a while for the two of you to develop chemistry. The teacher may be insecure about having someone observe her so avoid giving her advice or constructive criticism. Also, do not distract the teacher while she is conducting a lesson. In your interactions with students, be positive, encouraging, and respectful.

School involvement is more difficult for parents who work outside the home or are single parents. Their limited time or energy may keep them from helping out in school. While this may engender feelings of guilt, it is understandable if parents are unable to be very involved in school affairs - and it need not hamper their child's education. A parent does not need to volunteer at a book fair or chaperone on a class trip to demonstrate the importance of education. This message is conveyed most importantly at home in the way parents talk about matters of education and the priority they place on schoolwork. For parents who are occupied during the day and wish to contribute, opportunities are available to help out during non-school hours. You might offer to take care of the class rabbit during school vacation, manage the school booth at a weekend community fair, or sew costumes for the school play. If you are employed during the day, check whether your employer will give you release time to share your skills with students in school or allow you to arrange a class visit to your place of work.

A good starting point for becoming involved in your child's school is to join the Parent-Teacher Association (P.T.A.). Some school districts have a Parent-Teacher Organizations (P.T.O.), which has no state or national organization, as the P.T.A. does but which serves the same purpose as the local P.T.A. The national P.T.A., of which local P.T.A. members are automatically members, is the largest parent group in the country, with about seven million members. It uses its power to lobby on behalf of issues related to children (for example, asbestos in the schools or the nutritional value of school lunch programs).

Joining the P.T.A. and participating in its activities is a good way for mothers and fathers to meet people, gain specific information, and obtain the perspectives of other parents. Many parents join

their local P.T.A. but few participate. They may view the P.T.A. as primarily a social organization. While P.T.A.'s may arrange social activities for parents and teachers to foster a spirit of cooperation, these organizations are more action-oriented than in years past. Most go beyond raising funds although this function remains important, especially in light of the decreased funding for public education. They may also develop programs, provide speakers, offer forums for discussion of parent concerns, arrange activities to honor teachers, and sponsor student activities. Some P.T.A.'s are also forces for change, rallying parent support on behalf of a particular issue.

Opportunities for School Volunteering

- serve as room parent
- tutor students in the classroom
- read stories to students during recess
- assist at a class party
- speak to your child's class or school on a topic of student interest
- start an after-school computer club
- supervise children in an after-school recreational program
- prepare school bulletin boards
- serve as an aide on a school bus
- photograph students at school activities
- work as a clerical aide (for example, grading papers)
- work as an aide in the library, main office, cafeteria, or on the playground
- develop or work at a homework hotline
- organize teacher appreciation activities
- prepare food for an ethnic festival
- help write a school newsletter
- help run the book or science fair
- arrange assembly programs
- develop and help run a "guardian angel" program where parents are called if their child has not shown up for school and they have not notified the school of her absence
- develop a list of community resources for parents and children
- recruit other parents as school volunteers
- help construct a playground
- donate plants, books, carpeting, or other items
- help plant trees

*Dr. Shore, a frequent contributor to parenting magazines and guest on radio and television, is a school psychologist with the Hamilton Township (NJ) Public Schools. He has written three books, *The Parents' Special Education Handbook* (Warner), *The Parents' Public School Handbook*, (Simon & Schuster) and, most recently, *Special Kids Problem Solver: Ready-to-Use Interventions for Helping All Students with Academic, Behavioral and Physical Problems* (Prentice Hall).*