

School **COMMUNITY NETWORK**

Just Connect[®]



CONNECTION



Building Student Success within a Strong School Community[®]

School Community Network

Core Beliefs

A school community rests upon mutual respect, strong relationships, shared responsibility, and focused attention to students' learning. Its core beliefs are that:

- all parents have dreams for their children and want the best for them.
- all teachers are inspired by professional standards and personal conviction to see that their students succeed.
- student success is bolstered when parents, teachers, and other members of the school community work in unison in their behalf.
- school leaders are the prime movers in establishing and nurturing the processes and practices necessary in intentionally strengthening the school community.

Outcome Goals for a School Community

1. Reading & Literacy. Every student, and students of all ages, will learn to read well, read often, enjoy reading, and achieve literacy through a focused alliance of family support and powerful classroom instruction.
2. Self-Directed Learning. Every student will become a self-directed learner through teaching that incorporates study skills and learning strategies, homework practices that build effective study habits, and school and family guidance that encourages self-directed learning.
3. Respect & Responsibility. Every student will develop a sense of responsibility and respect for self and others that fosters social and emotional well-being through consistent direction and support from the family and the school.
4. Community. The school will function as a community of its members – students, their families, teachers, administrators, school staff, and volunteers.

Further Resources Available

<http://www.schoolcommunitynetwork.org/> - School Community Network website

<http://www.schoolcommunitynetwork.org/resources/> - Parent and School Resources, including Parent-Child Activities in English and Spanish, searchable databases, and more

<http://www.indistar.org/action/Community.html> - Indicators in Action - School Community Course, 5 professional development modules with video clips of effective practices in action (Courses on Instruction and Leadership are also available)

<http://www.centeril.org/personalcompetencies/> - Personal Competencies - Supporting the teacher's ability to influence a student's learning and personal competencies (cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, and social/emotional) by virtue of their personal knowledge of and interaction with the student and the student's family.

Connection

In a true community, people associate with one another in face-to-face connections. In a school community, teachers get to know parents, and parents get to know each other. When people connect in such direct ways, they come to better understand their important roles in children's education. Connections among members of a school community do not necessarily take place in the school. Outreach to parents in their neighborhoods and homes is an important way for school personnel to cement their relationships with families. When parents gather and get to know each other, they are better able to raise their children, children who influence each other as they spend their days together in school. This section of the Resource Manual provides helpful tools for creating opportunities for connection that strengthen a school community and its ability to provide the best support for students' learning and personal development.

Please note that "parent" as used throughout this manual includes any family member or guardian acting in the parental role for a student.

What You Will Find In Connection

Parent Rooms

Open House

Parent–Teacher–Student Conferences

Family Nights

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Parent Rooms



Parent Rooms and Family Resource Centers

A family resource center can provide a place that offers opportunities for parents to expand their parenting skills. It can be a place to engage in discussions or participate in workshops about common parenting concerns. It can be used to connect with community resources and to house a parent resource library. It could also be used as a meeting place for parent groups and blended parent/school teams.

Providing a parent room/family resource center:

- Communicates to parents that they are needed, welcome, and wanted
- Strengthens the child's support network through increasing parental knowledge
- Demonstrates positive support to parents by helping them to build skills that strengthen and reinforce parenting practices

In planning the content of your resource center it is helpful to survey parents to determine what types of support they feel is needed to become better partners in the education of their child. Build the content of your resource center around the expressed needs of the families. Suggested items for your resource center are listed:

- ✧ books on parenting
- ✧ materials for parents to establish good study habits
- ✧ parent-friendly version of state learning standards
- ✧ storybooks for reading to children
- ✧ educational family activities and games
- ✧ materials and activities for families with preschool children

Other items for consideration might include:

- ✧ Magazine racks with parenting periodicals
- ✧ Education area rug
- ✧ Stereo system
- ✧ Microphone
- ✧ CDs and/or DVDs (e.g., educational, relaxation, classical)
- ✧ Puppets
- ✧ Book baskets
- ✧ Resources to help parents cope (Stressbusters, etc.)
- ✧ Cookbooks and meal plans
- ✧ Children's recipes/ Holiday recipes
- ✧ Desk, chairs, tables
- ✧ Coat rack
- ✧ Storage for personal belongings
- ✧ Games
- ✧ Computer(s)
- ✧ Projection unit
- ✧ Conference table(s)

- ✧ Chalk board/dry erase/chart paper and marking instruments
- ✧ Bright pictures and posters

Parent resource materials can be donated, purchased, or made. Seek contributions for your center from businesses, publishers, book stores, and libraries. In selecting materials for your resource center, be sensitive to the religious and cultural make up of your school. Provide materials in more than one language if needed. Consider selecting materials that discuss the specific cultures and religions that make up your school community. Such materials will offer an opportunity for families outside of these groups to gain information about these cultural diversities.

Perhaps the biggest challenge in establishing a family resource center is generating parental interest and inspiring parents/families to use it. Spotlighting the center during open house, at conferences, in newsletters, on bulletin boards, and the school website would do much to elevate awareness. To motivate families to use the center, your school might offer movie rental coupons or free admission to a family fun park for each family that checks out materials, uses the internet, or physically visits during a given month.

If your space allows for trainings and workshops, take the following into consideration in planning your events:

- Offer your trainings at different times and days to accommodate most work schedules
- Provide child care
- Coordinate transportation

Family Resource Center Plan

Date: _____

School: _____ District: _____

City: _____ State: _____

Description of location:

Who will coordinate and manage the project?

How will circulation be handled? What will be the check-out policy?

What materials will be included?

How will we inform parents/families about the center?

Projected opening date: _____



Resources for A Welcoming Place

The following information is from *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships*, by Anne T. Henderson, Karen L. Mapp, Vivian R. Johnson, and Don Davies (pp. 70-72).

Establish a Family Center

A family center can give a school a whole new approach to engage and inform families. First of all, it's a nonthreatening place to have meetings, workshops, informal discussions, and social exchanges. Here are some activities that family centers have sponsored:

- A Father's Luncheon, at which over 350 fathers, grandfathers, uncles, brothers, and cousins ate lunch with children, visited classes, and signed up for school activities
- A "parent presence" that teachers can call upon to visit class and help with students' unruly behavior
- Food and clothing banks, lending libraries, and health fairs
- "The Light's On" afterschool program promoting students' interest in math, science, art, dance, drama, computers, and foreign languages
- Yard sales to make household goods and clothing available to families
- Talent shows at which parents, students, teachers, and other staff can show off their skills
- Child care so that families can meet with teachers or help out in class
- "Coffee with the Principal" on the first Monday of each month
- Adult and family literacy programs, ESL and citizenship classes, job skills training, and GED programs
- Parent education workshops on child development and other topics suggested by parents
- Tutoring, mentoring, and "homework clinics"

Most family centers are located in the schools they serve—in converted storage areas, unused classrooms, ends of hallways, even a former girls' shower room. When lack of space is a problem, schools have been creative. San Diego transformed a school bus into a Mobile Parent Resource Center, with tables, chairs, a copier, a laminator, and resource materials. Fairfax County, Virginia, has opened a family center in an apartment complex near the school, in a two-bedroom apartment donated by the landlord.

Family Centers are just as important in middle and high schools as they are in elementary schools. Where else in a high school could parents go if not to a family center? At all levels, they're a gathering place where families, school staff, students, and community members are welcomed and supported. They drop in, talk about what's on their minds, ask for advice, and check things out. They see family centers as a place like home, but in school.

Henderson, Anne T., Mapp, Karen L., Johnson, Vivian, R., & Davies, Don. (2007). *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships*. New York, NY: The New Press.



More Resources for A Welcoming Place

The following information is from *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships*, by Anne T. Henderson, Karen L. Mapp, Vivian R. Johnson, and Don Davies (p. 59).

Honoring Families	
Do More	Do Less
■ Hello! Welcome to our school. How may I help you?	■ “Who are you? What do you want?”
■ Welcome signs with the name of the school and the principal.	■ NO TRESPASSING signs.
■ Parent meetings that break into small discussion groups, each picking a leader.	■ Parent meetings dominated by a few “officers.”
■ One-to-one and small group meetings.	■ Large meetings in the school gym.
■ Thanking parents for contributions, large or small.	■ Complaining that parents don’t do more.
■ Meeting and greeting parents before and after school, and going to community events.	■ Hiding in the office and assigning parent involvement to the assistant principal or teacher’s aide.
■ Rotating meetings before school, evenings, and weekends.	■ Meeting only during school hours.
■ Involving families in selecting a new reading program.	■ Announcing a new reading program.
■ Surveying families to get their ideas and opinions about activities and programs.	■ Planning events, then publicizing them to parents.

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www.schoolcommunitynetwork.org