School COMMUNITY NETWORK

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SHARED LEADERSHIP

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 sup¬port 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.

Shared Leadership

Decision-making in schools is both shared and hierarchical. The idea of "shared leadership" is that leaders make decisions, and some decisions are best made by folks playing a variety of roles in a school community. To share leadership is to distribute decision-making among the constituencies of the school community, to place decision-making in the appropriate hands rather than to embed it within an organizational position. A desired consequence of shared leadership is to make the school community immune to the disruptions caused by changes in personnel, to provide continuity in the pursuit of goals, and internalization of values, purpose, and practice. Shared leadership contributes to a distinct school culture, broad understanding of and participation in the school's direction, and access to all the human and social capital that resides within the school community.

From *The Mega System: Deciding. Learning. Connecting.* Available at www.adi.org

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

What You'll Find In Shared Leadership

The School Community Council (School-Based Family Engagement Team)

The Parent–Teacher Organization

The School Improvement Team

Resources for Shared Leadership

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. 188).

Provide Workable Mechanisms for Teachers, Parents, and Students to Take Part in Decision Making

Partnership requires sharing power. The starting point for teachers and administrators is to see families as partners and not simply as clients or guests. All partners must have a voice in school affairs, including decisions about budgets, school programs and personnel, changes in curriculum and instruction, and student behavior.

One way for your action team to start is to hold a town meeting or a series of discussion groups to plan workable ways for teachers and other staff, parents, and students to express concerns and take part in decision making. . . .Ask all participants for their ideas about how to strengthen the school's links to families and community members. Offer other opportunities to invite suggestions such as homeroom discussions, parent association meetings, or surveys that older students or parents could design and administer.

Some important and widely used mechanisms that can foster demographic decision making, if they are implemented in a genuinely open spirit are:

1. School councils and committees

2. Parent or parent-teacher associations

3. School action teams for planning and research, including an action team for partner-ships

4. Parent-school compacts or contracts

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 Shared Leadership

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. 189).

Take Advantage of the Law

It provides several leverage points for parents to advance democratic practices in schools.

✦ *A school-family compact,* developed with and approved by parents. Bring parents and teachers together to discuss how they can work together more effectively to improve students' skills and put their ideas in the compact.

✦ *A written Title I parent involvement policy,* also developed with and approved by parents. Does the school need a new policy to help teachers and parents work together? When and how may parents attend professional development? Observe in classrooms? Meet with the principal?

✦ *A report card on every school* explaining how the school and the district are performing. Prepare teachers to explain student test reports fully to parents. Have a "state of the school" meeting to discuss what the school is doing to improve student progress.

✦ *Options for parents* if their child's Title I school is not making adequate progress in improving student achievement. Parents may request to transfer their children to another school, or they may decide to stay, become involved in improving the school, and receive extra services for their children.

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.

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More Resources for Shared Leadership

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. 212–213).

A Final Bit of Advice

No one has ever said that democracy is efficient. Winston Churchill once called it the worst form of government in the world—except for all the others. Differences of opinion and potential conflict are a natural part of school life. People have strong views on matters that affect their children. In most disputes, there are several possible points of agreement and compromise.

When a problem arises, openness about the matter from the start is usually the best approach. Attempts to cover up usually backfire. Don't be reluctant to bring in an outside person to help resolve confusion or disagreement about a school issue or policy.

It takes time to hear from all concerned and arrive at a consensus or a solution, but we argue, and experience shows, that the time taken is worth it. People who are involved in making decisions tend to support those decisions. Their buy-in will sustain the work, and that saves a lot of effort in the long run.

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.

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The School Community Council
(School-Based Team)

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What is the Role of the School Community Council?

The primary purpose of the School Community Council is to build a school community, uniting the efforts of parents/families, teachers, and students so that all children establish a solid foundation of reading, studying, and responsible behavior. The Council is the steering committee for the school community, the coordinating body, the group that maintains a focus on children's learning.

The School Community Council looks at the connections between the school and the families it serves and makes recommendations for strengthening the School Improvement Plan's emphasis on family–school connections. The Council must enlist the support and assistance of the parent organization and faculty to carry out its activities; it does not typically involve itself with fundraising. The Council does not sponsor activities in its own name, but on behalf of the school as a whole. The School Community Council brings people together, unifies, and creates synergy and good will.

This Council does not replace or duplicate the valuable services of existing parent–teacher organizations (PTA or PTO). It is a coordinating team that helps to build a strong school community around goals established in the School Community Compact. It works in cooperation with other groups and organizations in the school, and the work is typically behind the scenes, planning activities and maintaining a focus on the mutual roles of the family and the school in promoting reading, studying, and responsible behavior.

The School Community Council is most effective when it meets twice each month with agendas and minutes, operating with bylaws or a constitution that outlines its scope of responsibilities and the manner in which its members are selected and the term of their service.

This school-based team may be called by a different name in some schools, but should have the key characteristics described below.

The School Community Council:

- consists of the principal, a teacher, a counselor or social worker (if none is available, then a second teacher), and four parents (who are not school district employees); in schools with preschool programs, a PreK teacher and the parent of a PreK student are added to the School Community Council;

- looks at the connections between the school and the families it serves; and

- makes recommendations for strengthening the School Improvement Plan's emphasis on family–school connections.

The School Community Council can promote and facilitate ongoing conversation between parents and teachers around documents and events connecting the home and school. Parents appreciate knowing:

- how their children are doing,

- what the school is doing,

- what the school expects of parents, and

- how parents may contribute to the operation and improvement of the school.

Further, the School Community Council can encourage the school to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate opportunities for parents to meet with one another to encourage the sharing of norms, standards, and parenting concerns and successes. The school should also provide teachers and all staff with professional development and consistent policies to build their capacity to welcome and work with all families and to reinforce the school's clear expectations of parents. This includes promoting a strengths-based rather than deficit-based view of families.

The Team

The team may be an existing team (school improvement team, for example) or a team formed especially to conduct a family engagement analysis and to create an action plan to increase the school's effectiveness in this area. In either case, at least half of the members of the team should be parents of currently enrolled students, and these parents should not be employed by the school. Other team members would include the principal and faculty representatives. A typical team structure is the principal, parent facilitator (or social worker), a teacher, and four parents.

Team Building: Characteristics of Good Teamwork

- The team leader has good people-skills and is committed to a team approach.
- Each team member is willing to contribute.
- The team develops a relaxed climate for internal communication.
- Team members develop a mutual trust.
- The team and individuals are prepared to take risks.
- The team is clear about goals and establishes targets and dates.
- Team members' roles are defined.
- Team members know how to examine team and individual errors without per¬sonal attacks.
- The team has capacity to create new ideas.
- Each team member knows he or she can influence the team agenda.

Team building will occur more easily when all team members work jointly on a task of mutual importance. This allows each member to provide his/her technical knowledge and skills in helping to solve the problem, complete the project, and develop new programs. During this process, team building can be facilitated as members evaluate their working relationship as a team and then develop and articulate guidelines that will lead to increased productivity and team member cooperation.

As part of this process, team members need to learn how to be willing to manage conflict, evaluate group performance, and provide feedback and support that will encourage each member to meet his or her commitment to the team and the organization.

Team performance can best be evaluated if the team develops a model of excellence against which to measure its performance. Team-building is an effort in which a team studies its own process of working together and acts to create a climate that encourages and values the contributions of team members. Their energies are directed toward problem-solving, task-effectiveness, and maximizing the use of all members' resources to achieve the team's purpose. Sound team-building recognizes that it is not possible to fully separate one's performance from those of others.

As team members build commitment, trust, and support for one another, it will allow them to develop and accomplish desired results. Commitment, trust, and self-determination by each team member are critical in achieving a sustained high level of performance. Team members will learn to appreciate and enjoy one another for who they are and will help keep one another on track. The team will have developed its working methods so that they become an informal set of guidelines.

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