Indicator: The school has a Parent Involvement Policy that includes a vision statement about the importance of family–school partnership.

Evidence Review:

The current version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (also referred to as No Child Left Behind) requires in Section 1118 that schools receiving Title I funds have a written Parent Involvement Policy, that the policy is written with the assistance of parents, and that it establish expectations for parental involvement, coordinates with early childhood program's parent involvement strategies, and identifies and attempts to eliminate barriers to greater participation and more effective involvement. Research and best practices from exemplary districts exhibit the need for all schools to develop a shared vision of family engagement (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson & Davies, 2007; Westmoreland, Rosenberg, Lopez & Weiss, 2009). It is necessary to go beyond a compliance-driven approach; schools that lack a systematic approach to design and implementation of parent involvement efforts will be ineffective in improving student outcomes (Mattingly, Prislin, McKenzie, Rodriguez, & Kayzar, 2002; Paredes, O'Malley, & Amarillas, 2012).

Henderson & Mapp's (2002) review of research confirmed families' desire to be involved in their children's education across all ethnicities, locations, and socioeconomic status levels; it also confirmed that such involvement, especially involvement at home, was correlated with student achievement. They also echoed Swap's (1993) conclusions that effective parent engagement must be comprehensive in nature, with the school consistently interfacing with parents at many points, in many venues, over the course of the schooling years (Redding, 2006). A study that examined the school-level effects on tested student achievement in 129 high-poverty elementary schools that implemented a common set of comprehensive parent engagement strategies over a 2-year period showed significant positive results as compared with statistically matched schools (Redding, Langdon, Meyer, Sheley, 2004). Another study found links between outreach to parents and gains in the math and reading scores of low-performing students; outreach measured included face-to-face meetings, sending materials on ways for parents to help their child at home, and telephoning both routinely and when the child was having problems (Westat & Policy Studies Associates, 2002). The body of research in this field inspired researcher Kate Gill Kressley to urge education leaders to move beyond "random acts of family involvement" (2008) and instead build a "coherent, comprehensive, continuous, and equitable approach" to enable all families to support their children's success (Weiss, Bouffard, Bridglall, & Gordon, 2009, p. 4).

To support this effort, an effective Parent Involvement Policy must focus on improving student achievement and should include a vision statement developed with and for families, highlighting the importance of family-school partnerships (Henderson et al., 2007; Westmoreland et al., 2009).

> Parents should organize around a shared vision such as increasing the number of children ready for college or providing a quality education for all children, rather than around interests that often compete and divide parents…the school and parent visions should be aligned and a learning culture developed where educators and parents learn together. Parents should see the benefit of advocating for *all* children, as well as their own. Family engagement should not be an add-on or a program but should be interwoven throughout the school—its instructional program, planning and management, and other aspects of school life so that schools are places of connection. (Moles & Fege, 2011, p. 9)

In a vision-driven collaboration, "partners agree to share ownership and accountability for results; they work together to leverage and coordinate existing resources" (Blank, 2011, p. 47). Edwards (2011) reminds us that it is necessary to define parental involvement clearly so everyone understands what it means for your school community—everyone from senior district administrators to teachers to bus drivers, and a shared vision honors and supports each partner's role in supporting student success (Westmoreland et al., 2009).

Ellis and Hughes (2002) provide guidelines and an exercise for a partnership team to use in preparing a vision statement, with reminders that a vision statement answers questions such as "What will success look like?" and "What would you like to accomplish in the future?" They propose that "members of a partnership team may work hard but, without having a vision statement formally in place, they may not be as creative and focused in finding new and better ways to work together" (p. 24).

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Building Block: Goals and Roles

Indicator: The school's Compact outlines the responsibilities/expectations of teachers, parents, and students.

Evidence Review:

While it is a good practice for every school, Title I schools are required to develop, with parents, a "compact" that outlines how parents, school staff, and students will share responsibility and build partnerships for improving students' academic achievement (Henderson, Carson, Avallone, & Whipple, 2011; Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007). "Successful partnerships are based on give-and-take....A school-family compact is an opportunity to develop a clear, written agreement between parents and teachers about how they should work together" (Henderson et al., 2007, p. 198). Many schools miss the opportunities afforded by developing and using an effective compact. Research shows that all students benefit from family involvement in education, and low-income and minority students benefit the most (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Most parents want timely information about school goals and ways to learn so they'll know what to do at home to support their children's success—which a document with generalities does not provide (Henderson et al., 2011).

Researchers and practitioners recommend involving all families in the school (not just Title I parents) in the development of a compact. Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, and Davies recommend these steps to focus the compact on learning:

1. Look at your school's test data with parents. What are the areas of low achievement? Break down the data to find any gaps between different groups of students.
2. Set priorities for improvement and establish a goal for each one....Adopt a goal of moving all students out of the bottom quartile ("below basic") and moving more students into "proficient."
3. Ask parents, students, and school staff what they should do to meet the goals. Then ask each group to list what it wants the others to do.
4. Focus the compact on concerns that have come up in the discussions. For each area (e.g., homework, communication, rules of behavior), list what each group can do.
5. Draw up a first draft, then ask for comments. Revise it based on parents', teachers', and students' reactions. (p. 103)

According to Henderson et al. (2011), one school sent flyers and made personal phone calls, inviting parents to a presentation on developing compacts and the importance of parents to the process. After the presentation in the school library, parents broke into groups according to their child's grade level. Teachers shared tips for school success, then asked: What do teachers need to do to help the student? and, What can the school do to help parents support their children? The ideas generated by the parent groups were circulated to other school parents, who checked off the ideas most important to them. Teachers then identified themes and drew up the final compact for parents' approval.

The compact will list the responsibilities (some schools prefer the term "expectations") of parents/families, students, and teachers. Some also include a list for the principal/administrators. The compact should provide information or guidelines on:

- How the school will "provide high-quality curriculum and instruction in a supportive and effective learning environment;"
- Building partnerships between families and school personnel to help children learn;
- Homework and home study habits;
- Parent-child reading and teacher's reading assignments;
- Encouraging respectful, responsible behavior;
- Regular communication within the school community; and
- Encouraging attendance at parent-teacher-student conferences, open houses, and parent education programs offered by the school. (ADI, 2011; Henderson et al., 2007)

"Make sure the compact is signed by all three parties. A student-led family conference is an opportunity to present, personalize, and sign the compact" (Henderson et al., 2007, p. 199).

Examples:

A Best Practice Example

Revitalizing the School-Parent Compact required by the federal Title I program inspired teachers at Geraldine Johnson Elementary-Middle School in Bridgeport, Conn., to link activities for families to the School Improvement Plan. Teachers meet twice a month for 30 minutes in grade-level "data teams" to discuss how students are doing. At the beginning of the school year, each team identifies two or three skills on which to focus and develops strategies that families can use to promote learning at home. Based on those conversations, teachers design workshops and home learning activities, such as questions to ask while watching a movie or ideas for using math at the grocery store. The workshops and activities become part of a written School-Parent Compact in which teachers and families agree to collaborate. Nicole Fitzsimmons, a sixth-grade teacher, says, "The compact ties things together and brings us closer. Math workshops refresh parents' skills in solving equations and other areas of sixth-grade math. It's fun, not stressful."

In her coaching work with teachers on revitalizing their school-parent compacts, Patti Avallone, a former Connecticut teacher of the year who now works as a consultant with the state Department of Education, found that teachers began to look at parents differently once they got to know each other. "After having conversations with parents about how to improve student learning, teachers said they appreciated how much parents were willing to help," Avallone said. "As teachers, they came to realize that they had not been specific about the learning skills and strategies that they wanted parents to do at home. Teachers said, 'We often assumed that there was no support. Boy, were we wrong! Our relationship with families grew stronger and finally, we were all on the same page.' This is the kind of collaboration that strengthens student achievement. (Priority Schools Campaign, 2011)

Sample School–Family Compact	
1st Grade Teachers Will	**1st Grade Families Will**
Conduct daily small-group reading instruction.	Make reading a daily part of family time.
Read aloud each day to students	Ask children questions about books they're reading.
Provide take-home reading materials for students.	Visit the local library on a regular basis.
Provide homework that supports topics learned at school.	Complete homework assignments with students.
Take weekly trips to the school library.	Attend family literacy events at Macdonough School.
Keep families informed of children's reading progress and ways to support learning at home.	Stay in touch with teachers about reading progress.
Source: Macdonough Elementary School, Middletown, Connecticut (Henderson et al., 2011)	

Compact Dos and Don'ts	
Do	**Don't**
Keep the pledges about equal—no more than ten items for each group.	List fifteen obligations for parents and only five for teachers.

Be specific: "I will read to my child twenty minutes a day."	Be vague: "I will read to my child regularly."
Be respectful: "I will talk with my child about the need to get at least nine hours of sleep every night."	Patronize parents: "I will make sure my child is clean and rested." (Parents say: "Why do they think I don't do that?")
Follow up with tip sheets, such as hints for checking homework, negotiating TV time, and fun math activities.	Complain that parents aren't doing their job.
Send home interactive learning kits and reading materials.	Wonder why parents don't get books from the public library.
Ask "Are we sticking to our pledges?" at conferences and meetings.	Hand out the compact at the start of the year and never mention it again.
Revisit the compact every year	Use the same compact year after year.
Ask families, students, and staff what would make it better. Update it using the current student achievement data.	Forget to ask whether families and staff actually use the compact.
Source: Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships. (Henderson et al., 2007, p. 199)	

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Building Block: Goals and Roles

Wise Ways® / Academic Development Institute

Indicator: The school's Compact includes responsibilities/expectations that communicate what parents can do to support their student's learning at home.

Evidence Review:

The school is most effective when the home does its part. Therefore, the *connection* between the school and the home is essential to school improvement and school success. Helping parents fully engage in the learning lives of their children is a necessary function of the school, and one that requires considerable, consistent, and competent attention. A fruitful connection between the school and the home is built upon purpose, communication, education, and association. (Redding, 2006, p. 145)

Henderson and Mapp's 2002 review of research found that the parental involvement *at home* best predicted student achievement. Jeynes meta-analytic research indicated that parental expectations may be the most crucial component of involvement; the types of expectations that seem to have the greatest impact are those that are subtle but understood by the child, such as parental sacrifice to save for the child's college, low-stress communication, and a general agreement between the child and the parents on the value of a college education (Jeynes, 2010). Further, he describes research indicating that "parental styles with a combination of high levels of love and support and a beneficial degree of discipline and structure tend to provide the healthiest environment" for children; "moreover, evidence suggests that a teaching style high in love and support and that concurrently provides clear behavioral boundaries and enforces those boundaries maximizes learning" (Jeynes, 2010, "Parental Style," para. 2).

Jeynes (2011) proposes that schools should look for ways to encourage these beneficial, if subtle, actions and attitudes in parents and teachers. Weiss and Stephen (2009) report that programs that train parents to be appropriately and effectively involved in their children's homework have found positive effects on parents' supportive involvement, increases in the time children spend on homework, higher homework accuracy, and higher grades. This benefits of family involvement at home extends into high school, although it is important that parental engagement practices are developmentally appropriate and responsive to maturing adolescents' needs (Hoover-Dempsey, Ice, & Whitaker, 2009). Catsambis "found that adolescents whose parents were aware of their coursework, encouraged college attendance, and obtained information about postsecondary opportunities completed more course credits in science and mathematics. She also found that parental supervision at home was strongly associated with academic achievement in 8th grade, but not in 12th grade" (Sanders, 2011, p. 142).

"A school-family compact is an opportunity to develop a clear, written agreement between parents and teachers about how they should work together. Compacts are required for Title I schools under No Child Left Behind and are a good idea for any school" (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007, p.198). Best practices indicate that a compact should focus on learning, including ways that parents can support their child's learning at home and opportunities for parents to communicate with the school to increase these supports (ADI, 2011; Henderson, Carson, Avallone, & Whipple, 2011; Henderson et al., 2007). Recommended steps in developing a compact include:

6. Ask parents, students and school staff what they want the compact to cover. Each group should list what it wants the *others* to do, and then list what should be expected of *themselves*.
7. By all means, avoid compacts that apply only to parents and students. Teachers are a key part of the learning triangle, and the rules should apply to them, too.
8. Focus the compact on common concerns (e.g., homework, communication, rules of behavior) and link them to learning. For each topic, list what each partner can do. For example, consider a homework compact:

    Students: I will write down assignments, do my homework every day, and turn it in when it's due.

    Parents: I will look over the assignments, talk to my child about them, and make sure he/she does the work and hands it in.

    Teachers: I will assign homework that is relevant and interesting, make sure students understand the assignment and what they'll learn from doing it, and grade it promptly.
    (Henderson et al., 2007, p. 198-199).

Example:

FRANKLIN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL (SAMPLE) SCHOOL COMMUNITY COMPACT

I. GOALS

We, the Franklin Elementary School community, establish this School Community Compact so that:

- **Goal 1**: **Reading.** Every student will learn to **read well, read often, and enjoy reading** through a focused alliance of family support and powerful classroom instruction.
- **Goal 2**: **Studying**. Every student will **become a self-directed learner** through teaching that incorporates study skills, homework practices that build study habits, and parental guidance.
- **Goal 3**: **Respect & Responsibility**. Every student will **develop a sense of responsibility and respect** for self and others through consistent direction and support from the family and the school.

- **Goal 4**: **Community.** The ***school will function as a community*** of its constituents—parents, students, teachers, and other school personnel.

II. RESPONSIBILITIES

A. Parent's and Family's Responsibilities

We will:

Goal 1: Reading

- Know what skills our child is learning in reading each day.
- Complete activities at home, like the Reading School-Home Links (K-3), that reinforce our child's classroom learning.
- Read with, or to, our child for 15 minutes each day, five days a week (Pre-K-1st grade).
- Read with, or to, our child for 30 minutes each day, five days a week (grades 2-3).
- Provide a quiet place for our child to read.
- Encourage our child to read for pleasure and to learn.
- Get a library card for our child, and encourage our child to bring reading materials from the library into the home.
- Visit the library with our child.
- Talk about reading with our child—what our child is reading and what we are reading.
- Establish family reading time as a family activity.

Goal 2: Studying

- Spend a few minutes each day with interactive learning activities (activities parents and children do together) with our pre-school child.
- See that our school-age child spends at least 10 minutes per grade level per day, five days a week, studying and completing homework at home (example. 4th grader—40 minutes).
- Establish a study place at home that is quiet, well-lit, and where our child can sit to study.
- Monitor our child's study time, offering praise and encouragement.
- Check our child's assignment notebook at least once each week.
- Assist our child with study resources by providing books and taking him/her to the library.

Goal 3: Respect and Responsibility

- Make sure that our child attends school regularly, is on time, and is prepared to learn, with necessary supplies and homework completed.
- Expect our child to behave responsibly and treat other people with respect.
- Teach our child to help other people.
- Teach and reinforce table manners and telephone manners.
- Teach our child to make proper introductions and greet people warmly and respectfully.
- Teach and encourage our child to look for the good in other people and to pay and receive sincere compliments.
- Listen attentively to our child each day.
- Teach and model acceptance of responsibility for the positive and negative outcomes of personal behavior.
- Teach and model responsible decision making.
- Model good citizenship and encourage our child to demonstrate good citizenship in the classroom, school, home, and community.

Goal 4: Community

Attend parent-teacher-student conferences and open houses and communicate frequently with our child's teacher, through notes and conversation, about how well our child is doing and what we can do to help.

Participate in programs offered by the school for parents, including workshops and courses.

B. Student's Responsibilities

I will:

Goal 1: Reading

- Ask my family to read to me or with me for 15 minutes each day, five days a week (Pre-K-1st grade).
- Ask my family to read to me or with me for 30 minutes each day, five days a week (grades 2-3).
- Read regularly for pleasure as well as to learn.
- Talk about reading with family members, friends, and teachers.
- Write about my reading by keeping a reading journal.

Goal 2: Studying

- Pre-school children: Spend a few minutes each day with my parents with an interactive learning activity (something we do together).
- Study at home in a quiet place at least 10 minutes per grade level per day, five days a week (example: 4th grader—40 minutes; 9th grader—90 minutes).
- Complete my homework on time in a thorough and legible way.
- Welcome help from my family on my homework and papers.
- Study while sitting up in a quiet, well-lit place.
- Plan study time to avoid conflicts with other activities.
- Complete and turn in all assignments.
- Keep an assignment notebook to record assignments, due dates, work completed, and grades.

Goal 3: Respect and Responsibility

- Arrive at school on time and ready to learn.
- Pay attention to my teachers, family, and tutors, and ask questions when I need help.
- Help other people (family members, teachers, friends) each day.
- Exhibit good table manners and telephone manners.
- Make proper introductions and greet people warmly and respectfully.
- Look for the good in other people and pay a sincere compliment to someone (family member, teacher, friend) each day.
- Listen attentively to someone (family member, teacher, friend) each day.
- Behave responsibly and treat other people with respect.
- Recognize and accept the positive and negative outcomes of my behavior.
- Accept responsibility for my learning and persist until I get the job done.
- Demonstrate good citizenship in the classroom, school, home, and community.

Goal 4: Community

- Attend parent-teacher-student conferences and keep my parents informed about what I am doing in school.
- Keep my parents informed about what I am learning and doing at school.

C. Teacher's Responsibilities

I will:

Goal 1: Reading

- Keep parents informed of the reading skills their children are learning and how they can reinforce the skills at home.
- Assign Reading School-Home Links to my students at least three times each week (K-3).
- Provide time for students to read and encourage discussion and writing about reading.
- Participate in professional development in how to teach reading and how to communicate with families.
- Read to students at least twice each week.
- Require students to read each day.
- Make "Writing about Reading" assignments each grading period.
- Encourage class discussion about reading.
- Teach students methods for reading for the purpose of mastering the material.

Goal 2: Studying

- Provide parents of pre-school children with interactive learning activities that they can do together.
- Assign homework regularly, including reading assignments, and collect, correct, and return homework.
- Use homework assignments to help students master material rather than to introduce new material.
- Grade homework and return it promptly to students, marking the work with comments particular to the student as often as possible.
- Count homework grades toward the report card grade.
- Teach students how to study.
- Teach students to monitor their own learning.

Goal 3: Respect and Responsibility

- Encourage students to behave responsibly and treat other people with respect.
- Teach and encourage students to be helpful.
- Teach and reinforce table manners and telephone manners.
- Teach students to make proper introductions and greet people warmly and respectfully.
- Teach and encourage students to look for the good in people and to pay and receive sincere compliments.
- Teach and encourage attentive listening skills.
- Clearly apprise students of assignments to be completed and hold students responsible for meeting obligations.
- Teach and model acceptance of responsibility for the positive and negative outcomes of personal behavior.
- Teach and model responsible decision making.
- Model good citizenship and encourage students to demonstrate good citizenship in the classroom, school, home, and community.

Goal 4: Community

- Communicate frequently with parents about their children's progress and show them how they can help.
- Hold at least two parent-teacher-student conferences a year.
- Encourage parents to participate in parent education programs offered by the school.

Source: Academic Development Institute, *Solid Foundation Planning Guide.*

Resources and other references:

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Building Block: Goals and Roles

Wise Ways® / Academic Development Institute

Indicator: The school's homework policy requires homework at all grade levels; provides guidelines for the amount of daily study time at home by grade level; stresses the importance of checking, marking, and promptly returning homework; and makes homework a part of the student's report card grade.

"Homework is effective in student mastery of facts and concepts as well as critical thinking and formation of productive attitudes and habits. Homework has compensatory effects in that students of lower ability can achieve marks equal to those of higher ability students through increased study at home" (Redding, 2000, p. 15). Homework is also a primary point of interface between the school and the home, and parents are best able to support the school's purposes for homework when they understand what is expected of students and their role in monitoring their children's homework. Consistency from teacher to teacher and across grade levels and subjects, established by a homework policy, contributes to teachers', parents', and students' understanding of the school's purposes for homework and also reinforces students' formation of independent study habits (Redding, 2006). Establishing, communicating, and carrying out clear policies will increase the likelihood that homework will enhance students' academic achievement (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001).

Meta-analyses suggest a positive relationship between homework and achievement, with percentile gains from 8% to 31% (Cooper, Robinson, & Patall, 2006; Marzano & Pickering, 2007).

Numerous studies have been conducted about possible benefits of homework but have tended to focus on achievement alone and ignore other expected outcomes. Studies on achievement (Cooper, Robinson, & Patall, 2006) found that more time doing homework actually predicted lower achievement for elementary school students. Middle school students doing less than 90 minutes of homework per night did better academically than students who did no homework; however, those doing more than 90 minutes a night did worse than students who did less. One explanation might be that students who spent more time were probably struggling academically. The more time high school students spent doing homework, the higher their achievement, with benefits leveling out at 2 hours per day. (Shumow, 2011, p. 77)

Schools facilitate parents, students, and teachers in their efforts with homework by establishing a schoolwide standard for frequency and quantity of homework (Redding, 2000). Those doing extensive research in the field (e.g., Dr. Herbert J. Walberg, Dr. Harris Cooper) recommend using the "10-minute rule," that is, expecting roughly 10 minutes of homework each night per grade level (i.e., 40 minutes for a 4th grader, 70 minutes for a 7th grader). Assignments should be coordinated across teachers and/or subjects to "avoid overburdening students with multiple projects simultaneously" (Van Voorhis, 2011b, p. 111).

Well-designed homework is also useful for building other skills, such as self-directed learning, motivation, self-regulation, and practicing good study habits (ADI, 2011; Redding, 2006; Van Voorhis, 2011b); it can also be a focal point of constructive family interaction and allows the parents to see what the student is learning in school (Redding, 2000). Shumow (2011) states, "researchers have repeatedly documented that parents with low income, limited education, or minority status are just as likely to help their children with homework as other parents (Lee & Bowen, 2006)." Families across a range of socioeconomic backgrounds and locations (both rural and urban) also play an important role in promoting desirable homework emotion management strategies (Xu, 2005; Xu & Corno, 2003, 2006). However, if there is no schoolwide homework policy, parents may become confused and frustrated. If homework is important, why do some teachers assign much and others none, and why do some grade the homework and count it toward the report card grade, while others don't? It is important for the school community to collaboratively create and use a homework policy (ADI, 2011; NWREL, 2005).

Instead of having to be content experts, parents should set regular hours and clear expectations for where and when their children will work on homework. When parents set the stage for students to do their homework, they communicate the value of learning, and encourage skills such as responsibility, confidence, persistence, goal setting, planning, and the ability to delay gratification. (NWREL, 2005)

These subtle forms of parental involvement (parental expectations and style that communicate the value of learning through both love and consistent discipline) have been shown through meta-analyses to be the best predictors of student achievement (Jeynes, 2010, 2011).

Research indicates that "students learn best when homework is assigned regularly, graded, returned promptly, and used primarily to rehearse material first presented by the teacher at school" (Redding, 2000, p. 15). Studies of homework that included an interactive element requiring children to talk with someone at home about the assignment (and usually have it signed) have shown a variety of significant, positive outcomes, including improved student achievement, increased parent involvement, and better teacher attitudes (Bennett-Conroy, 2012; Epstein, Simon, & Salinas, 1997; Van Voorhis, 2003, 2011a). Homework design matters, too. The task assigned may evoke different types of parental involvement, some more helpful than others; one study found "more open-ended tasks without clear predetermined

procedures might evoke the most beneficial parent-child interaction" (Shumow, 2003, p. 20). Children like sharing about their families through homework and other assignments; this may be even more true for those from collectivist cultures (vs. the more individualistic U.S. culture)—one study reported that when 3rd-grade immigrant students wrote about family experiences, they tended to write more than when asked to write about "what it's like to be a good friend," and their scores jumped on the district-wide writing assessment (Trumbull & Rothstein-Fisch, 2011, p. 39).

Redding's (2000) research review found:

The effects of homework do not increase proportionately with the amount assigned, but rather with the frequency (or regularity) of its assignment, the nature of the assignment, and the teacher's attention to the student's work. Homework is most effective when it is:

- frequent;
- directly related to in-class work;
- used to master rather than introduce new material;
- graded and included as a significant part of the report card grade; and
- returned to the student soon after it is collected, and marked with comments particular to the student. (p. 16)

For the homework policy to be effective, those affected by it must be given assistance in carrying it out, actual practices must be monitored to detect and correct problems, and successes should be celebrated (ADI, 2011). Teachers may need professional development to learn to design effective homework assignments and to establish positive, two-way communication with students' families (Shumow, 2003; Symeou et al., 2012). Parents meetings or workshops may help supplement tip sheets informing families of the best ways to facilitate their child's study at home (Priority Schools Campaign, 2011). In fact, training parents to be involved in their child's homework may result in higher homework completion rates, fewer homework problems, and improved academics among elementary students (Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008). Implementation of the policy should be assessed yearly and revisions made if necessary (ADI, 2011). Finally, rewarding students and/or classes for great homework completion can be a fun motivation for students and staff—some schools have a quarterly party, place banners outside the top classroom, or provide other ways to celebrate students' efforts (e.g., Redding, 1993).

Guidelines for Homework

Homework is most effective when it is used in ways proven to contribute most to student learning and acquisition of independent study habits. Guidelines for effective homework include:

- Ask parents to facilitate homework completion rather than help with homework content. Well-planned homework should not need parental help (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001).
- Homework should be assigned regularly.
- Teacher comments on homework are vital; graded homework that counts is most effective. Prompt return of homework by teacher is essential (Austin, 1976; Elawar & Corno, 1985).
- Practice and preparation assignments are primarily the responsibility of the students to complete themselves.
- In the elementary grades, brief forms of parental involvement are desirable (especially those assignments that call for students to show or explain their work to parents and get their reactions).
- Assigning homework for punishment is inappropriate.
  (ADI, 2011; NWREL, 2005; Redding, 2006; Walberg, 1984)

Action Principles for Homework Policies and Practices

- Review or develop a school homework policy with input from teachers, students, families, and administrators. Include it in the School Improvement Plan.

- Include guidelines about time (per grade level), purpose, feedback, and ways for students and families to communicate (with the school and each other) about homework.
- Use family-friendly language, consider multiple formats for distributing information, and translate the document as necessary to reach all students' families.
- Include homework design and implementation in professional development offered at the state, district, and school levels.
- Recognize teachers who have met homework challenges, and provide them a forum to share lessons learned.
- Consider ways to guide families in supporting their children's learning at home, including online assignment posting, homework hotlines, newsletters, or workshops.
- Establish mechanisms for two-way communication with parents about homework.
- Periodically conduct formal and informal surveys that include student, teacher, and parent views about homework practice and effects. Use results to improve future policy and practice. (Shumow, 2011; Van Voorhis, 2011b)

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Indicator: The student report card provides parents an opportunity to report on the student's home-based studying and reading habits.

Evidence Review:

"Report cards are a powerful tool for communicating with families—perhaps the single most impactful tool that educators have—and often serve as the basis for parent– teacher conferences" (Mart, Dusenbury, & Weissberg, 2011, p. 42). Student report cards can also be a tool for reinforcing a school community's goals and the family's and school's roles in achieving those goals (Redding, 2006, 2011). For example, two school community goals might be:

- 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.
- 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. (Redding, 2011, p. 17–18)

Providing means for parents to report on the student's reading and study habits at home (via report cards and other methods) reinforces the parents' role in encouraging these goals and gives them an opportunity to voice what teachers can only guess. Providing a section for parent (and possibly student) comments may also give the teacher a better idea of how the information in the report card is being interpreted (Wiggins, 1994).

> Teachers should review parental responses in a timely manner to determine any required follow-up. Carefully prepared report cards, coupled with parent conferences as needed, provide effective communication regarding student learning. Significantly, teachers can prevent confrontations with parents by ensuring that the report card is not the first communication when concerns exist. Rather, frequent progress reports, phone calls, and/or e-mail messages should support and improve student performance (Graham-Clay, 2005, pp. 119–120)

The home is highly influential in a student's school success, including literacy development (Redding, 2000, 2006; Walberg, 2007). Hiatt-Michael (2011, p. 88) cites research showing:

> Parental expectations, speaking and reading to children, number of books in the home, parental interest in written and oral communication, parental knowledge of language arts development, and parental enjoyment of reading foster student achievement in reading (Fernandez-Kaltenbach, 2009; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Xu, 2008).

Parents' encouragement in the use of correct, effective, and appropriate language forms a child's readiness for the language-rich environment of the school (Redding, 2006). Redding (2011) also states:

> Children are most likely to become avid readers, skilled learners, and self-confident, socially adept, respectful, and responsible human beings when they are part of a community of people working together on their behalf. Such is the nature of a strong school community in which everyone plays a role. (p. 18)

Henderson & Mapp's (2002) review of research confirms families' desire to be involved in their children's education across all ethnicities, locations, and socioeconomic status levels; it also confirmed that such involvement, especially involvement at home, was correlated with student achievement. They also echoed Swap's (1993) conclusions that effective parent engagement must be comprehensive in nature, with the school consistently interfacing with parents at many points, in many venues, over the course of the schooling years (Redding, 2006). A study that examined the school-level effects on tested

student achievement in 129 high-poverty elementary schools that implemented a common set of comprehensive parent engagement strategies over a two-year period showed significant positive results as compared with statistically matched schools (Redding, Langdon, Meyer, Sheley, 2004).

Excellent communication is vital to a healthy school community and to student achievement (Graham-Clay, 2005; Jeynes, 2010; Redding, 2006; Walberg, 2007). Hiatt-Michael (2011) states, "Two-way communication between family and school serves as a conduit for active dialogue and learning" (p. 88). Experimental studies have confirmed the power of positive, bidirectional communication between teachers and students' families to promote student success (Bennett-Conroy, 2012; Kraft & Dougherty, in press). Well-designed report cards (see Guskey, 2011) can be one of the tools used to facilitate communication. School personnel need to make sure parents understand what is being measured and reported in the report card—especially as many schools switch to standards-based report cards:

> The better examples are basing reports on student learning criteria (criterion-referenced), rather than simply reporting a child's relative standing among classmates (norm-referenced). Although most parents are accustomed to the latter, reporting relative standing among classmates tells nothing about what the child has learned or is able to do. (Guskey, 2004)

Report cards can also be used to reflect a student's progress toward meeting standards for social and emotional learning. By doing so, schools send a message about the importance of these competencies and provide structured opportunities for teachers, families, and students to discuss social and emotional development—an important step toward promoting holistic school–family partnerships (Elias, 2009; Mart, Dusenbury, & Weissberg, 2011, p. 42).

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Indicator: Classroom visit policy is clear, constructive, and includes a plan for communicating the policy to parents and teachers.

Evidence Review:

Research shows that schools can improve their students' learning by engaging parents in ways that directly relate to their children's academic progress, maintaining a consistent message of what is expected of parents, and reaching parents directly, personally, and with a trusting approach (Epstein, 1995; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Patrikakou, Weissberg, Redding, & Walberg, 2005; Patrikakou, Weissberg, & Rubenstein, 1999; Redding, 2000, 2006). From the evidence available, Henderson and Mapp's (2002) review of research drew convincing conclusions about the characteristics of successful school efforts to engage families.

> Most specifically, effective school initiatives to engage parents: 1) build a foundation of trust and respect, 2) connect parent-engagement strategies to learning objectives, and 3) reach out to engage parents beyond the school. These three qualities are found in schools where parent involvement is measurably high, in specific programs that demonstrate effects on learning outcomes, and in schools that exhibit high levels of achievement. Henderson and Mapp echo the conclusions of Swap (1993) that effective parent engagement must be comprehensive in nature, with the school consistently interfacing with parents at many points, in many venues, over the course of the schooling years. (Redding, 2006, p. 149)

Such comprehensive engagement efforts have been shown to improve student achievement in a relatively short amount of time (Redding, Langdon, Meyer, & Sheley, 2004)

Parents (who are not school staff) should be involved in creating a clear and constructive classroom visit policy (ADI, 2011; Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007). This plan should balance the need to minimize classroom disruptions or interference with student learning, maximize safety, and also create a welcoming and transparent environment for families. It can be created with or in addition to policy guidelines for classroom volunteers. While all parents should be welcome to visit, inviting immigrant parents into the classroom may assist them in learning about teaching practices in American schools and ways they can support their children's achievement (Lim, 2012). The classroom visit policy offers an opportunity to reinforce the goals of the school community and each stakeholder's role in that community (Redding, 2011).

Questions to ask when creating a Classroom Visit Policy (ADI, 2011)

1. Is advance notice required? If so, how much in advance? Whom does the parent call to request a visit? Where does the visitor first report when entering the school?
2. How is the teacher notified?
3. What is the role of the parent when visiting? Where is the parent to sit? How much is the visitor to be involved?
4. What is the role of the teacher? Greeting. Explanation of what is going on in classroom.

While a procedure for visiting should be established to accommodate parents as needed, some schools have taken creative approaches to offering visit times. Redding (2000) suggests designating a time when teachers are available for walk-in conferences. For example, some schools set aside 30

minutes before school on certain days of the week when all teachers are available to parents. Henderson et al. (2007, p. 63) describe classroom visit days that are used by the O'Hearn School in Boston; they provide the following rules for such a day:

Do	Don't
1. Walk right into any classroom that does not already have 3 visitors. 2. Go into the room along the side or back. 3. Observe what is happening in the room. 4. Talk with staff members only if approached by them. 5. Leave when you want. Spend no more than 20 minutes in one room unless otherwise arranged. 6. Leave messages or questions for staff in their mailboxes. 7. Ask the principal any question you want.	1. Go into any room that already has 3 other visitors. 2. Disrupt the students' learning. 3. Take pictures without prior permission. 4. Ask staff questions while they are engaged in teaching.

Finally, the policy can only be effective if it is communicated clearly and frequently to everyone in the school community and implemented consistently. Create a friendly, inviting handout communicating the policy in simple language; translate this document for families whose home language is not English. Teachers, front office and other support staff, and administrators may need professional development in providing a welcoming environment for parents and family members of students. However, the results of establishing the kind of environment that nurtures true partnership focused on student learning is worth the investment (Henderson et al., 2007; Redding, 2006, 2011; Redding et al., 2004). Open houses, family–school nights, and parent–teacher–student conferences can be prime venues for sharing information about policies affecting families and opportunities for two-way communication and parent involvement (HFRP, 2010; Redding, 2011). Providing the classroom visit policy at conferences lets "families know when and how they can visit the school at other times" (HFRP, 2010, p. 4).

Example:
First of all, the school must be a safe place for students and teachers. It must also be an orderly place where learning can take place. So policies are in place to direct visitors to the main office and require them to sign in. Security procedures to deal with visitors who act suspiciously or in a threatening manner are in place.

Thankfully, it is very seldom the school must deal with unpleasant visitors. For the most part, visitors are parents of students in the school or friendly members of the community. What are your policies and procedures for dealing with friendly visitors, especially parents?

Discuss each of the points below, determining if this is an area that could use some attention. Then develop a plan to address areas of concern.
1. The school telephones are answered by staff who are pleasant, cheerful, and helpful.
2. All staff—including teachers, teachers' aides, clerks, custodians, cooks, and others—greet visitors in the hallway in a pleasant and helpful manner to solicit their needs and to direct them to the office.
3. Office staff greet visitors promptly, cheerfully, and helpfully.
4. There is a written policy regarding visits by parents to their children's classrooms. The policy includes:

- a provision that advance permission is requested,
- procedures to notify the teacher,
- a friendly handout for visiting parents to explain their role in the classroom—where they should sit and what the teacher will expect them to do, and
- guidelines for teachers to greet parents warmly and explain to them what is going on in the classroom.

5. The signs that greet visitors outside the doors and in the hallways are friendly while also being clear about the expectation that visitors register in the office. Helpful signs pointing to the office are placed on hallway walls.
6. The school provides special attention to welcome families that are new to the school.
7. The school has clear expectations of all school staff that they address students and parents respectfully.
8. The school makes every effort to minimize interruptions in the classrooms, including the frequency of announcements. (ADI, 2011)

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