

Changing the Conversation

Changing the Conversation with Families in Persistently Low-Achieving High Schools: Guidance for Implementation of School Improvement Grants

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“If you can get a critical mass of engaged, thoughtful, and knowledgeable parents to participate on a consistent basis, that school will be successful.”

Only Connect: The Way to Save Our Schools, Rudy Crew

CII - Promising Practices

A Different Kind of Family Engagement

With the 2009 revamp of the federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) program, the distinction between continuous school improvement and dramatic change was made clear. The SIG grant recipients would be selected from the very bottom of each state’s schools in terms of student performance on state assessments and graduation rates, and the expected trajectory of improvement would be steep. In fact, improving the existing schools played second fiddle to providing a significantly enhanced educational opportunity for the students attending the school. The school could be closed and the students enrolled in superior schools. The school could be closed and a charter school opened in its place. The school could be operated under contractual arrangement with an education management organization. Or the school could remain under district management but engaged in a turnaround or transformation.

In a turnaround, the existing staff would be released and not more than half rehired. In a transformation, in most cases, the principal would be replaced and a rigorous teacher evaluation system put in place. In a transformation, other conditions would also be met, including significant change in curriculum and instruction, extended learning time, and engagement of families and community resources.

Roughly three out of every four schools in the 2009 cohort (which began implementation in the fall of 2010) chose the transformation model. Half of these schools were high schools. What, then, would a persistently low-achieving high school do differently with its students’ families that would contribute to a sharp improvement in student outcomes (test scores or graduation rates, primarily) in a three-year period? That is the question this issue brief addresses, and the answers are not necessarily the same as what would be recommended for family engagement practices in a school that is already doing well for its students.

In planning its SIG implementation, a school community must first engage in a candid conversation about the serious work it has undertaken. It also must deal with the reason the dramatic change is

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necessary. The school has not provided the education necessary for its students to demonstrate acceptable results in learning and persistence in school. The life consequences for many undereducated students are disheartening, and the parents of these students have much at stake as the school sets out on a rapid improvement trajectory.

The first conversation among school personnel and parents in a SIG school must be to enlist everyone's involvement in the big job of changing the school's direction, altering the way it operates, and raising the expectations of teachers, students, and parents. This conversation requires an open airing of data about the school's current performance, a shared vision of a much better school, and a practical understanding of the pathway to success.

Whether a persistently low-achieving high school is involved in a turnaround or a transformation, the conversations among school personnel and families take a new direction, one of candor and heightened responsibility. Meaningful conversations are ones that value families as resources and collaborate with parents as equal partners in their children's education. Sustained conversation means that parents' leadership roles are developed to ensure that high levels of academic achievement for students remains at the forefront of the school long after the three years of School Improvement Grant funding have passed.

This brief provides information to SEAs and LEAs working with secondary schools, as well as to the schools themselves, to change the conversation with families in order to support reform efforts. The brief begins with research on family engagement at the secondary level to provide an evidence-based foundation for selecting appropriate strategies. Based on the research, the brief then highlights two approaches that hold promise for family engagement. The first approach enables families to monitor their students' progress in meeting graduation requirements and college and career readiness through data tracking, strategies to provide families with resources for struggling students, and ways to promote the acceleration of academic programming for successful students. The second approach, Parental Leadership Development for School Improvement, identifies four designs for parent leadership training. In addition, because research has shown that persistently low-achieving schools do not communicate well with families, this brief includes a section on ways to develop mutual ownership of reform efforts and seven principles to employ when building partnerships with families. Finally, this brief concludes with a discussion of evaluation of family partnership efforts and recommendations for moving forward.

Ongoing learning and the use of state-of-the-art resources is critical to high-quality school and family

partnership efforts. Thus, Appendix B provides resources aligned with the federal guidance for SIG applications.

What the Research Says

Research on family influences on student performance in school suffers from three limitations:

1. Although research evidence correlates family characteristics and relationships with school success, linking school initiatives to changes in family behaviors is less certain.
2. Research demonstrates that schools with high levels of parent involvement typically outperform schools in similar contexts with low levels of parent involvement, but rarely confirms that the practices of the school engendered the higher level of parent involvement rather than benefited from it.
3. Most family-school research has been done at the elementary school level, and little significant research confirms a relationship between high school practices, family behaviors, and student outcomes.

The weakness of the research on school impact on family behaviors and relationships, especially at the high school level, demands only that we dig deep for solutions and stretch school practices beyond what has previously been attempted. Maintaining a focus on student learning and persistence in school as the desired outcomes of more targeted and aggressive family engagement activities will avoid the pitfall of scattered effort with little return. Family engagement must be deliberate, focused, and comprehensive over time.

Herbert J. Walberg has published widely on the factors that influence student learning, including family structures, behaviors, and relationships. In his 2011 book, *Improving Student Learning: Action Principles for Families, Schools, Districts, and States*, Walberg concluded that cognitive and language stimulation in the family setting emerges as an essential contributor to student academic success. While preschool and elementary school programs are best positioned to offset deficiencies in this area, high schools can make up for lost time through direct contacts with parents (including home visits) that stress, model, and provide guidance on the importance of continued parent-child communication; reinforcement and discussion of reading; and conversation about current events, school experiences, and plans for the future.

An example of a large-scale study of how changes in school practices can positively affect student learning outcomes is that of the Solid Foundation project in 123 low-achieving Illinois schools from 2001 to 2003. In a two-year period, the gains in reading and mathematics by the project schools nearly doubled the gains of a

control group of schools with matched beginning composite scores on the state assessments. While the project was conducted in elementary and middle schools, not high schools, its conclusions are still enlightening. As reported at the 2004 annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Redding, Langdon, Meyer, & Sheley, 2004), in a chapter in *School-Family Partnerships for Children's Success* (Redding & Sheley, 2005), and in a research brief from the Harvard Family Research Project (Redding, Langdon, Meyer, & Sheley, 2004), the study found that the results were achieved through:

1. A comprehensive approach that linked parent engagement to student learning at multiple points through the two years;
2. Emphasis on parent-child interaction relative to reading and studying through interactive, parent-child reading assignments completed at home and returned to school; summer reading activities that included parents; guidance on the parent's role in homework; and consistent school homework practices;
3. Outreach to parents through home visits and parent-hosted home gatherings, with a focus on reading;
4. Guidance for parents on learning standards;
5. High fidelity to implementation, supported by a parent facilitator (school staff member) and an external partner.

Persistently low-achieving secondary schools must address the critical need for high-quality family engagement that leads to academic success. Research by Bridgeland and colleagues (2008) highlighted the urgency of effective family partnership efforts in low-achieving high schools. Their research found marked discrepancies between the experiences of parents whose children attended a high-achieving high school and those whose children attended low-achieving high schools:

- Only 15% of parents of students at low-achieving schools felt that the school was doing a very good job challenging students, compared with 58% of parents of students at high-achieving schools.
- Only 51% of parents of students at low-achieving schools, compared to 70% of parents of students at high-achieving schools, have had good conversations about their child's performance with at least half of their children's teachers.
- Eighty-three percent of parents with students in high-achieving schools said their school was doing a very or fairly good job communicating with

them about their child's academic performance, compared to only 43% of parents with students in low-achieving schools.

Low-achieving secondary schools must make family engagement central to their improvement process. This can be accomplished through communications that engage parents in conversations regarding their students' performance and equip them with the means to monitor their students' progress, which in turn enables them to participate as equal partners in their children's success. Such conversations need to be ongoing and involve district and school leadership, teachers, and counselors and should take place in community settings as well as at the school building. A focused and comprehensive approach to the engagement of families and communities enables parents to have ongoing access to information that impacts their children, while they play an active role in ensuring their children's educational progress.

Strategies for Transformational Family Partnership at Low-Achieving Schools

Perhaps the most substantial analysis of the connections between: a) family characteristics and relationships; b) school practices (including high schools); and c) student outcomes is William H. Jeynes's book, *Parental Involvement and Academic Success* (2011). Jeynes traces the history of family-school relationships and explicates concepts of parental involvement with his own meta-analyses, including a meta-analysis of high school studies. Jeynes concludes that, in general, parental involvement demonstrates a significant effect on student outcomes in high school. This held true for both the general population and for minority students. Jeynes found that parental style and parental expectations were more predictive of student success than household rules or parental participation in school activities.

Because Jeynes found a mild relationship between family socioeconomic status and parental involvement, he offers an explanation. Better educated parents are more likely to achieve higher socioeconomic status, and these same parents may be more inclined to provide parental support for their children's academic achievement because they know the value of an education to success in life. This would bolster the finding that parental expectations are a major factor in student learning outcomes.

It would be easy to draw an inadequate conclusion regarding the importance of parental expectations in the school success of high school students. More is at play than a parent's simple expression of high aspirations for their children. Parents who know what is necessary in the student's everyday life (including school life), know how their children are faring in school, and know what it

takes to achieve in school are more likely to guide their children in practical ways, as well as to encourage their dedication to study.

With this in mind, we might approach family engagement in low-achieving high schools by asserting that the school must help parents understand:

1. Their children's current achievement and skill levels;
2. Their children's goals beyond high school;
3. The academic requirements for their children to achieve these goals;
4. The course selection, level of effort, and persistence necessary to meet the academic requirements; and
5. The ways the parents can support their children each step along the way.

Constructing school initiatives to address these five components for building effective family engagement at the high school level gives us an outline for what schools can do. For persistently low-achieving schools, these components must be addressed with urgency, consistency, and in a comprehensive manner. Strategies that enable parents to monitor their child's academic achievement, provide family support for college and career readiness, and enable parent leadership training for school improvement are explored in the following pages.

Parental Monitoring for Academic Achievement

"Parents see two very different school systems in America – one that is largely fostering academic achievement in their students and another that is not; one that is effectively engaging parents in the academic lives of their children and another that is failing to do so."

One Dream, Two Realities: Perspectives of Parents on America's High Schools
Bridgeland, Dilulio, Streeter, and Mason

In the research conducted by Bridgeland et al. (2008), one of the most compelling findings had to do with the level of information parents received regarding requirements for graduation and college admission: Seventy percent of parents whose children attend high-achieving schools say the school does a good job informing parents of the requirements for graduation and college admission, compared with only 38% of parents of students in low-achieving schools.

Lack of parental knowledge of graduation requirements poses a serious impediment to academic achievement.

Parental knowledge of their children's current achievement and skill levels and the course selection, level of effort, and persistence necessary to meet the academic requirements is essential to ensure school success. Practical parental guidance cannot take hold in an environment where requirements are not transparent and communicated clearly, and each student's progress toward these requirements fully explained. SEAs and LEAs can enact initiatives to ensure parental knowledge of key academic achievement information and support parental efficacy in utilizing this knowledge to ensure their children's academic success.

A promising approach for SEAs and LEAs to consider is the development of direct outreach programs that assist parents in monitoring for academic attainment and completion of graduation requirements. With these programs in place, partnerships between parents and schools can be established that enable families to understand and engage in their children's achievement of key benchmark goals for secondary school completion.

States are in a unique position to leverage resources to assist families in monitoring achievement. As SEAs set newly revised benchmarks for academic attainment and graduation in secondary schools, they can work to ensure that districts and schools communicate these goals effectively to families. Additionally, in their capacity as monitors of LEA use of Title I funds, states can work to ensure that Title I parent funds are used to support engagement that efficiently links parents to their children's school data and to help them to identify areas such as attendance, behavior, or course completion before they become problems that prevent on-time graduation. When students struggle to meet academic goals, schools need to engage families in conversations that enable them to link to tutoring, mentoring, and practical learning strategies to ensure that each adolescent can catch up and remain on track for graduation.

Two promising approaches that have been shown to enable families to monitor their children's progress more effectively are the New York Aris Data System Readiness Tracker and the Parental Training for Tracking Student Data (Washoe County, Nevada). In the first approach the parents receive a summary of where their child stands in relationship to graduation requirements. In the second approach the parents benefit from training that enables them to track and interpret student data.

Parental Monitoring for Graduation – New York's Aris Data System Readiness Tracker

New Visions for Public Schools is a partnership support organization in New York City. It works with 76 schools, mostly high schools, on parent involvement efforts

that inform ninth-grade students and families about information critical for student success. It has created student-level performance data tools, four core ninth-grade college readiness benchmarks and a college readi-

ness tracker. The college readiness tracker (see tool on following page) enables all stakeholders to quickly and easily determine students' progress in various academic areas as they move beyond ninth grade (Weiss, Lopez, & Rosenberg, 2010).

Figure 1: New Visions College Tracking Tool

NEWVISIONS.ORG | **THE ROAD TO COLLEGE**

Are You On Track?

Place X's in each box for the courses and exams you have passed.

	Years Required	9th Grade	10th Grade	11th Grade	12th Grade	Regents Exam
English	4 years	<input type="checkbox"/> ELA-required				
Math Math A Math B, (strongly recom- mended)	3 years (4 years recommended)	<input type="checkbox"/> Math A-required <input type="checkbox"/> Math B-required				
Social Studies Global Studies U.S. History Government Economics	4 years *2 years * 1 year * 1 semester * 1 semester	<input type="checkbox"/> Global History <input type="checkbox"/> U.S. History (Both are required)				
Science Earth Science Living Environment Chemistry Physics	3 years (4 years recommended)	<input type="checkbox"/> Science-required <input type="checkbox"/> Second Science - advanced				
Electives Art Music Other	4 years * 1 semester * 1 semester	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Health & Gym	2.5 years	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Second Language	1 year (3 years recommended)	<input type="checkbox"/> Language - advanced				

Parental Training for Tracking Student Data (Washoe County, Nevada)

Washoe County developed parent training in an effort to raise its 56% high school graduation rate. The district worked with the Nevada Parent Information and Resource Center (PIRC) to reach out to and train parents in its online data system. Parent Information Facilitators (PIFs) train parents in graduation requirements and how to interpret student data so that they know whether their students are on track in terms of attendance, grades, and credit accumulation. D’Lisa Crain, Administrator for Washoe’s Department of Family–School Partnerships, says that “Families leave these computer workshops empowered from knowing how to access their student’s data and where to go for help if there is a problem with attendance or grades.” They also know where to find computer kiosks in the 96 community locations that display special banners (Crain, 2010).

Family Support for College and Career Readiness

While Jaynes (2011) found that parental style and expectations had a greater impact on student achievement than demonstrable behaviors such as parental rules, he also notes that parental participation in school events matters in terms of school outcomes. He states that parental participation in school events does have an impact specifically on grades and in addressing the achievement gap for low-income and minority children. Jaynes posits that this may be due in part to the improved relationships between parents and teachers and its impact on school outcomes (2011, p. 71).

Jaynes comments further regarding parental involvement programs that:

Emboldening parental support of student academics appears to produce some positive impact for all students....Parental involvement may represent an important means of raising the educational outcomes of urban students specifically...parental involvement can be a means of reducing the achievement gap between these student and those more advanced scholastically. (2011, p. 116)

State and local educators can embolden parental support for their children’s goals beyond high school and communicate the academic requirements for their children to achieve those goals through targeted outreach. One approach is to develop family-friendly guidelines for assisting children to prepare for college and careers. Through such guidelines, SEAs and LEAs can highlight the critical role of successful completion of gateway courses (like Algebra I) and the standard courses for high school completion and college admission and success. Focus on

parental understanding of course flow, the role of high parental expectation for success, as well as how to work with their adolescent student’s school to ensure success are critical.

Table 1: Sample Family College and Career Readiness Plan shows the types of activities that are appropriate at the middle school and high school levels. (See SIG Guidance resources in Appendix B at the end of this publication for additional resources.) Depending on school turnaround or transformation efforts, such a plan may highlight specific aspects of school reform efforts and should reflect specific family goals for college and career readiness for their child beyond high school.

Table 1: Sample Family College and Career Readiness Plan

Grade	Set High Family Academic Expectations	Plan for College and Career
Middle School Transition	Visit area high schools to select one that can best support your goals for your child’s academic success	Take part in summer programs to prepare for HS work and deepen knowledge in areas of interest.
By 9th grade	Plan for success in Algebra I—much college prep coursework relies on the skills introduced in this course.	Draw up an academic plan and select an appropriate program for your child’s career and college interest.
Grades 10-12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Be familiar with what high level work looks like. ■ Be knowledgeable of the sequence of college prep coursework. <p>At minimum:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Algebra 2, Geometry & at least 1 high level math course • 3 science courses with labs (Biology, Chemistry, & Physics) • 3 years of English • 2 years of a world language • 3 years of social studies (history, civics, & economics) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Attend college fairs and decide with your child on the type of college he/she will attend. ■ Explore careers and identify the level of math, science, and communication skills needed to be successful in each career area that matches your child’s interest. ■ Attend workshops on and take the PSAT. (Practice in 10th grade; 11th grade counts as a “scholarships qualifying” test.) Ask your school when this is being offered. Date of PSAT_____ ■ Prepare for and schedule the SAT (Spring of Jr Year, Fall of Sr Year). Register your child for the SAT here: http://sat.collegeboard.com/register ■ Fill out college application. See common application here: https://www.commonapp.org/CommonApp/default.aspx ■ Fill out Family Financial Aid forms (FaFSA). Complete the FaFSA online here: http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/

Districts and schools (especially schools in the lowest income communities) need to be able to leverage resources for the academic acceleration of students who are on track for college but who are not being given access to accelerated academic programming (AP, Honors, weighted classes, dual credit, for example.). Access to accelerated programming prior to college helps ensure college success. Parents need to understand the options for acceleration as well as the supports that are available to ensure their child’s success in accelerated programming and in college.

Table 2: Questions for Low-Achieving Schools summarizes key questions for SIG schools to ask when engaging families around supports for struggling students as well as promoting college readiness for students who are on track to graduate.

Table 2: Questions for Low-Achieving Schools

<p>How do we ensure family participation?</p>	<p>How does the school partner with local employers, community agencies, and correctional institutions to provide off-site meeting times for parents who cannot come to the school during the day?</p> <p>Does the school offer orientation for new families and a transition program from feeder schools?</p> <p>Does the school have an explicit college pathways program, and if so, how does the school explain the program to families and offer ways to partner with them to be sure students graduate on time, with a college or post-secondary training program acceptance letter in hand?</p> <p>Are instructional workshops and resources provided for families throughout the year to enable them to make linkages for learning at home and to access the curriculum of the school?</p> <p>How does the school work with its feeder school (upper elementary to middle, middle to high school) to ensure that parents receive information on upcoming accelerated learning opportunities (and on how to prepare their child for them)?</p> <p>Does the school have special programs that address the needs of children raised by grandparents or in foster care or other guardian and caregiver arrangements?</p> <p>In what ways are parents who did not attend college assisted in preparing successful college applications for their child?</p>
<p>How do we support struggling students?</p>	<p>How does the school ensure immediate notification of parents when their child exhibits difficulties with attendance, behavior, or course failure?</p> <p>What timely supports does the school offer to students when they begin to struggle?</p> <p>How does the school partner with local mentorship, tutoring, and youth advocacy organizations to support struggling students and their families?</p> <p>Does the school have special programs to address the needs of students who are bored or disaffected by mainstream approaches to learning?</p>
<p>How do we ensure academic acceleration?</p>	<p>How does the school notify parents when their child exhibits talents and interest in a particular area of study or inquiry? What information does the school offer about community resources that can further nurture those talents and interests?</p> <p>How does the school partner with local colleges and universities to establish internships or mentoring relationships for students whose parents have not attended a college or university?</p> <p>What programs does the school have in place to link families to accelerated coursework (summer enrichment, AP, Honors) that will enable their child to have high-level learning experiences not traditionally available in their schools?</p>

While SEA and LEA support for parental monitoring for academic achievement and leveraging family support for college and career readiness is critical, supporting the development of parent leadership for school improvement will ensure that reform efforts can be sustained over the long term. The next section describes parental leadership development as a means to build family and community capacity for school improvement.

Designing Parent Leadership Training for School Improvement

“There are no ‘models’ for building parent and community support for school reforms because each school’s situation is unique. There is a common, immediate need, however, to mobilize parents and communities, hold everyone accountable for higher student learning and building the capacity of people to carry out critical reforms.”

Urgent Message: Families Crucial to School Reform

Anne C. Lewis and Anne T. Henderson

Parent leadership programs can empower parents (or other caregivers) to support their children at each step along the way through building a sense of efficacy and purpose that enables the parent not only to effect improvement for their child but improvements in the school as a whole. Parent leadership training programs are designed to prepare parents to participate in formal settings as team members and as leaders.

If parents are going to be effective in these roles, formal parent leadership training is essential. Title I schools are required to include parents as members of school improvement teams; leadership training enables parents to work effectively as partners on these teams. Parent leadership programs have proliferated over the years and have led to increases in parental involvement in leadership as well as in middle school transition activities and home learning activities. Parent leadership programs have expanded parental expectations and increased their knowledge of how the educational system works and how to use data to understand children’s academic achievement and to make decisions about school improvement. Preparing parents for leadership roles on school improvement teams requires that states, districts, and schools work in partnership with families to develop a cadre of parent leaders. Prior to developing a training program, there should be a conversation to assess with families what purposes and specific goals the training should address.

It is important for school leaders to keep in mind that this is a long-term effort that will require multiple approaches to address the learning styles of adults, many of whom may not have a formal education or may not have attended school since their own adolescence. An inclusive school environment is essential to successful partnerships with families, and there should be some sessions planned with only parents/community members and other sessions that include school staff.

Prior to any training there should be an opportunity for families to do a school walk-through. If the district has not developed a school walk-through instrument, there are many examples that can be adapted. Following the walk-through, which may take several visits to individual schools, there should be an opportunity to have a debriefing session with school staff to share their findings. The figure below describes eight core elements that districts should have in place to ensure effective parent leadership development.

8 Core Elements of Parent Leadership Training

1. Get acquainted with each other and the tasks they will undertake: utilize ice-breakers and team building activities linked to topics that will be addressed is an ideal first step. Review the school’s mission/vision statements and the school improvement plans.
2. Provide context of the school, Title I, and the important role of parents: review the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and roles and responsibilities of parents, including school compacts and specifics in Title I, section 1118. <http://www2.ed.gov/legislation/ESEA/sec1118.html>
3. Provide parent engagement research and the linkages to student achievement: a variety of activities should focus on the four primary roles parents play in supporting their child’s academic success. Those four roles (Teachers—Supporters—Learners—Decision-makers) should be the foundation of this discussion.
4. Establish clear, two-way communication: effective two-way meaningful communication, communication styles, and the language of schools should be considered (reducing jargon; languages spoken other than English).
5. Help parents advocate for their children: prioritizing needs for student achievement and reasonable expectations for what the school should provide to meet those needs is a critical component of training. Coaching parents in how to present and substantiate their perspective as well as stand their ground for their position enables them to be effective advocates.

6. Show how the school works: requirements such as attendance, graduation requirements, college and career opportunity programs, and understanding the use of data are some topics of importance; understanding the SIG and the school's improvement plan.
7. Practice action planning: participants should develop a personal family plan as well as how they will work as a member of the school improvement team or other decision-making bodies. Training should also include key protocols essential to parent leadership development.
8. Develop social capital: training offers an opportunity for development of parent members' affiliation and positive relationships and experiences that improve well being as well as create new social outlets and resources. Parents learn from and support one another.

The elements above are not a comprehensive training design; rather, they provide an outline of what a school or district can incorporate into parent leadership training. Parent leadership training is a serious undertaking that will take time. States have family advisory councils or adult education branches that can assist with training initiatives. One of the primary roles an SEA can play is to assist LEAs and schools by facilitating meetings, serving as a resource, providing materials, and assisting in keeping the process on track. While parent leadership development requires a significant amount of commitment and planning, the opportunity to ensure parental and community capacity to effect improved schools and increased student achievement is well worth the investment (Corbett & Wilson, 2008).

Anne Henderson has recently completed a summary of the kinds of parent leadership development and training available in the educational landscape: (1) Parent Leadership (Role Development), (2) Parent Training, (3) Parent Academies or Universities, and (4) Parent Leadership (Partnership Focused). Table 3: Henderson's Four Types of Parent Leadership/Training Designs (see Table 3 on next page) summarizes these four parent training models (Henderson, 2010).

The parent training programs take place across a variety of time increments, from eight weeks to open-ended and multiple course options. However, programs share in common a variety of practices. Practices of successful programs include the following:

- Seeking parent and community input into their program structure, content, design, and delivery;
- Devising innovative strategies for outreach and recruitment to capture their target audience;

- Employing flexible modes of delivery that build relationships and are respectful of family backgrounds and circumstances;
- Building the influence of the program and the power of their graduates; and
- Developing and leveraging connections with government officials to give the program legitimacy and access.

Prior to selecting or developing a model, an essential first step is to gather data about the specifics of a training initiative. This can be done through the use of focus groups, surveys, and small group conversations. Parent leadership training can also be developed in partnership with federally funded Parent Information Resource Centers (PIRCs). Each state has a PIRC, and states, districts, and schools should consider the resources available through their PIRC. Several PIRCs have already created leadership training programs along the lines of CIPL, PIQE, and The Parent Academy, including Indiana, Washington, DC, and Maryland.

Knowledge of the unique aspects of parent engagement for secondary level students is also critical to the creation of programs that will support families in SIG schools as they guide their children's learning through the end of high school. With the families of high school students, educators need to offer the following types of support:

- Regular meetings with teachers and counselors to plan their child's academic program;
- Advisory system;
- Parent portal to district and school web sites to monitor children's homework completion, assignments, grades, and attendance (Washoe County, NV, is a good example);
- A college office in the high school to assist students and families with choices, applications, and financial aid;
- Information about program options, graduation requirements, test schedules, and postsecondary education options and how to plan for them;
- Explanations of the courses students should take to be prepared for college or other postsecondary education; and
- Information about financing postsecondary education and applying for financial aid.

The next segment of this publication describes approaches to meaningful engagement that can help to ensure that connections and conversations with families are of high quality, mutually respectful, and productive.

Table 3: Henderson’s Four Types of Parent Leadership/Training Designs

Four Types <hr/> Description of Training Examples	1. Parent Leadership for School Improvement	2. Parent Training for Immigrant Families	3. Parent Education via Academy or University	4. Parent Advocacy to Navigate the Educational System
General Description	Develops parents for roles in associations, school councils, district committees, and school boards.	Assists marginalized families who have been poorly served by their school to understand the school system and to promote their children’s advancement to college.	Provides a broad range of learning and leadership opportunities including home learning and education credits to increase employment.	Assists families to collaborate and develop policies to improve student learning.
Training Elements	Understanding student data & state standards, project focused on improving student achievement, increasing parent involvement, and having lasting impact.	Home learning environments; school system expectations for parent involvement; communication w/ teachers; preparation for college.	Child development; navigate education & related systems; workforce development.	Civic leadership; partnership for change; educational policies and practices.
Sample Program Names and Locations	Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership (CIPL) in Kentucky and spinoff programs in Delaware, Mississippi, Ohio, Oklahoma, & Texas.	Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE) in California and spinoff programs in Texas and other states.	Parent Academy in Miami Dade and similar programs in Philadelphia, Boston, & San Diego.	Parents Seeking Excellence in Education (Parents SEE) in Connecticut; Families in Schools in Los Angeles.

Importance of Evaluation to Ensure the Efficacy of Parental Involvement Efforts

Many schools have spent considerable time and resources on family engagement activities that yield disappointing levels of participation and result in no palpable outcomes for students. Persistently low-achieving schools do not have the luxury of time or resources to waste on unproductive activity. For that reason, family engagement strategies must be intentionally designed, carefully evaluated, and refined or pruned as the results indicate. Redding and Keleher (2010) provide a logic model for designing and evaluating family engagement programs (found in Appendix A). The logic model guides the school through a process of determining the initiative’s effectiveness guided by the following:

1. **Type or category:** Is this program aimed at enhancing parent involvement, parenting skills, and/or school community? Will the program address specific challenges faced by some students? Some parents?
2. **Target audience:** Will the program include parents? Teachers? Students? Others? Is it designed for certain grade levels? Interests? Characteristics of participants?
3. **Purpose, goals, and objectives:** What does the program intend to accomplish? Objectives may be identified by asking:
 - a. **Knowledge:** What will participants know that they did not know prior to their participation in the program?

- b. **Skills:** What will participants be able to do that they were not able to do prior to their participation in the program?
 - c. **Actions:** In what ways will participants' behaviors and habits change as a result of newly acquired knowledge and skills?
4. **Theory of action:** A theory of action addresses the ways in which the program will “work” in changing participants' knowledge, skills, and actions. A theory of action is determined by asking:
- a. **Incentives:** How will the program enhance the participants' motivation to achieve the intended outcomes?
 - b. **Capacity:** How will the program provide the participants with the necessary knowledge and skills to achieve the intended outcomes?
 - c. **Opportunity:** How will the program remove barriers that stand in the way of participants achieving the desired outcomes and provide them with avenues for personal adaptation of the program's proposed or prescribed practices?
5. **Activities, tasks, outputs, timeline, and responsibilities:** This is the common planning component in the logic model, linking elements of the program to its purpose and providing a roadmap for implementation.
6. **Evaluation design—data sources, criteria, data analysis:** The evaluation design is suited to the purpose of the program and includes the instruments, forms, and data sources necessary to make formative and summative determinations about the program.
7. **Uses of evaluation results:** Will periodic reports be prepared? How will the information be shared? With whom? For what purpose? How will the program be improved in response to the findings?

This intentional construction of family engagement initiatives and their evaluation is always good practice, and in attempts to dramatically improve the performance of persistently low-achieving schools, it is imperative.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Changing the conversation with families in low-achieving secondary schools will require authentic, ongoing interactions that build partnerships between school staff and parents, and between the parents and their children. Such opportunities will equip parents with the knowledge to work on a more equal footing with their school to ensure their adolescent's academic success.

As states build a district's capacity to engage parents and families of students at the secondary school level, they will increase the likelihood that school improvement efforts will become institutionalized because the schools have the understanding and support of families. Schools engaged in turnaround and transformation efforts must openly engage their students' families and the community in understanding the urgent need for reform, supporting significant change, and shouldering their share of responsibility for sustaining the improvements. In addition to their support for rapid institutional change, each parent must be provided with the information and guidance to support his or her own children in mastering learning standards, meeting graduation requirements, and preparing for the challenges that lie beyond high school.

Recommendations

- State education agencies may want to work through informal community settings to field their ideas for developing effective collaboration with families. Community service organizations such as social service agencies and faith-based family programs are already working closely with parents in diverse communities. These organizations and programs can assist in the planning and the dissemination of information on parent engagement in secondary achievement and in leadership development for parents of secondary students.
- State parental organizations such as the Parent Information and Resource Center (PIRC) and Parent Teacher Association (PTA) have training resources available for parents on various aspects of leadership and school improvement. (See Appendix B.)
- States may already have districts that are successful in engaging parents in secondary school achievement. Those districts can be a resource to SIG schools as they work to develop promising approaches to engage families and ensure their long-term success.

- Partnership with parent-run organizations is also critical in the design of parent training. Parent advisory committees (The PACs) are comprised of a majority of Title I parents and have the responsibility of providing input into the planning, implementation, and evaluation of Title I programs. Title I parents, with the support of the National Advisory Council on the Education of Disadvantaged Children, civil rights, national education advocacy organizations, and foundations, organized The National Coalition of ESEA Title I Parents.
- Many national organizations, through their state and local affiliates, can partner with the state to leverage effective messages to parents that communicate the importance of family engagement throughout secondary school and emphasize the role that high parental expectations play in ensuring children's academic success and career readiness.

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Ms. Brown has been a teacher and program developer in a variety of settings, including public schools, social services organizations and a community college. She has provided technical assistance and training in parent involvement, staff-parent communication, and decision making partnerships to Head Start staff at regional and national training events. She has also held workshops on parent-child learning and human rights education for public school teachers and adult literacy practitioners in Washington, DC. Ms. Brown holds a B.A. in Sociology from the University of Virginia, and an M.A. in English Linguistics from George Mason University.

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Sam has authored books, chapters, and articles on school improvement, state systems of support, school turnarounds, parent involvement, and the school community. Sam served on the expert panel on school turnarounds for the Institute of Education Sciences. He has consulted with more than 30 state education agencies and many districts.

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Appendix A: A Parent Program Logic Model with Evaluation Design

Name of Program:		Notes:			
Goal (Theme) of Program:					
Program Type(s):					
Program's Target Audience:					
Program's Theory of Action: Incentives: Capacity: Opportunity:					
Program Evaluation		Data Sources	Criteria	Data Analysis	
Program's Purposes (Objectives)—Summative (Outcome) Evaluation					
Knowledge:					
Skills:					
Actions:					
Program Activities:—Formative (Process) Evaluation					
Activity 1:	Tasks	Outputs	Timeline	Responsibility	
	1.				
	2.				
	3.				
Activity 2:	Tasks	Outputs	Timelein	Responsibility	
	1.				
	2.				
	3.				

Source: Redding & Keleher, 2010, p. 165

Appendix B: Additional Resources

SIG Guidance: General Aspects of Family Engagement

Fiscal Year 2010 School Improvement Grants under Section 1003(g) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. U.S. Department of Education, November 1, 2011. A close examination of SIG Guidance provides SEAs and LEAs with concrete approaches to family engagement in school improvement. Below are links to well-regarded family and community engagement resources that can assist educators in addressing specific elements of SIG guidance.

Increased Learning Time: While SIG guidance from the U. S. Department of Education focuses on an expanded school schedule (day, week, or year) to provide increased instruction, especially in core subjects, learning time may also be increased through family-directed activities.

Engaging Families and Community in Selecting an Intervention Model and Enacting and Sustaining Reforms: Federal guidance advises the LEA to include stakeholders in the determination of the appropriate intervention model in a SIG application and in supporting and sustaining the reforms.

- Annenberg Institute. *Beating the odds student survey* (English and Spanish versions). <http://www.annenberginstitute.org/products/bto.php#studentSurvey>
- Annenberg Institute. *Family focus group protocol*. <http://www.annenberginstitute.org/pdf/BTOProtocolFamilies.pdf>
- Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, KSA Plus Communications. (2004). *The case for parent leadership*. http://www.prichardcommittee.org/Portals/1059/CPL/Case_Final.pdf
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- U.S Department of Education, Office of Innovation. (2010, June). *The education innovator: A new era of family engagement, 9(5)*. www.ed.gov
- U.S. Department of Education. (2007-08). *Helping families by supporting and expanding school choice*. This 2-page document (available as html or pdf) provides information to states, districts, schools, and parents concerning expanding their options for children's schooling. It covers topics such as public school choice, SES, charter schools, magnet schools, and Pell Grants for Kids.
- Parent Satisfaction and Involvement in Magnet Schools
 - ♦ Dale Ballou, Vanderbilt University. Public school choice: Magnet schools, peer effects, and student achievement. <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/schoolchoice/magnet1.html>

College and Career Readiness: Readiness for college and career is a chief Department of Education goal and is especially important for SIG high schools.

- Minnesota Parent Information and Resource Center. (2011, January). *Paving the path to higher education for your child*. (Action Information Sheet). <http://www.pacer.org/mpc/pdf/MPC-76.pdf>
- The Education Trust. *How to help your child prepare for college and career, A guide for African American parents/ A guide for Hispanic parents*. <http://www.edtrust.org/dc/resources/for-parents-and-communities>
- The National PTA Magazine. (December 2010-January 2011). *Our children: Special issue on improving graduation rates*. http://www.pta.org/documents/OC_Dec2010-family_engagement.pdf
- Florida PIRC. (2009). *School & family safe school partnership: Tip sheet*. http://www.floridapartnership.usf.edu/documents/english/tipsheets/School_Safety/School%20and%20Family%20Safe%20School%20Partnership_ENG.pdf

- National Education Association. (2009, December). *Keeping family-school-community connections helps support secondary students' success*. (Policy Brief). "To be successful, especially at the middle school and high school level, partnerships must be linked to student academic improvement and integrated into overall school improvement efforts." Recommendations for state and local policymakers are included.
- Parent Involvement Strategies in Urban Middle and High Schools in the Northeast and Islands Region (webinar) April 2009 – Regional Educational Laboratory Northeast and Islands.
- National Center on Secondary Education and Transition. NCSET coordinates national resources, offers technical assistance, and disseminates information related to secondary education (high school) and transition for youth with disabilities in order to create opportunities for youth to achieve successful futures. <http://www.ncset.org/>

Communication with Families and the Community: Maintaining ongoing communication with families and the community about the reform efforts and progress is essential to internalizing and sustaining the reforms. Federal guidance suggests surveys to gather input from families and the community as well as methods for keeping them informed. In school closures and restarts, particular attention must be given to preparing families in both the schools that are closed and in the schools that receive the students.

- Lopez, Elena M., Kreider, H. (2003). *Beyond input: Achieving authentic participation in school reform*. <http://www.hfrp.org/evaluation/the-evaluation-exchange/issue-archive/evaluating-education-reform/beyond-input-achieving-authentic-participation-in-school-reform>
- Center on Innovation & Improvement. *Communicating about school reform* (Webinar and Powerpoint). <http://www.centerii.org/webinars/>
- Harvard Family Research Project. (2010, October). *Breaking new ground: Data systems transform family engagement in education*. <http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/breaking-new-ground-data-systems-transform-family-engagement-in-education2>
- *Guide to choosing the right school*. <http://www.greatschools.org/school-choice/>

Social-Emotional and Community Service Programs: All students and their families benefit from social-emotional learning and from connection to community resources and opportunities for community service. Federal guidance recommends these as particularly key components in transformations and turnarounds.

- Center on Innovation & Improvement. Implementing Community-Oriented School Structures is a portion of the *Handbook on effective implementation of school improvement grants* that provides action principles for districts and schools as well as resources on family engagement. http://www.centerii.org/handbook/Resources/4_F_Implementing_Community_School_Structures.pdf
- Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). Our mission is to establish social and emotional learning (SEL) as an essential part of education. We envision a world where families, schools, and communities work together to promote children's success in school and life and to support the healthy development of all children. <http://www.casel.org/>

Family Support for School Learning: The Federal SIG guidance recommends strong attention to helping parents provide the home environments most conducive to school learning.

- Taylor, T., & Dounay, J. (2008, August). *Strengthening parents' ability to provide the guidance and support that matter most in high school*. (Policy Brief). Education Commission of the States. <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/78/48/7848.pdf>
- Center on Innovation & Improvement. Engaging Families in Student Learning is a portion of the *Handbook on Effective Implementation of School Improvement Grants* that provides action principles for districts and schools as well as resources on family engagement: http://www.centerii.org/handbook/Resources/9_I_Engaging_Families_in_Student_Learning.pdf
- CII has multiple resources available at www.families-schools.org including *A parent's guide* - This booklet has quick and easy ideas that will improve children's learning, covering family routines to talking with teachers to handling homework to connecting with other parents and more. Also available in Spanish: Una Guía Para Padres

- Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center. (2008). *Parent involvement: Keys to success* [podcasts and accompanying materials]. <http://www.arcc.edvantia.org/page/ParentInvolvementPodcasts/>
- www.families-schools.org provides databases of resources for parents and for schools in working with parents.
- Harvard Family Research Project. (2009). *Parent -teacher conference tip sheets for principals, teachers, and parents*. <http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/parent-teacher-conference-tip-sheets-for-principals-teachers-and-parents>
- Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL). (2005). *Engaging families at the secondary level: What schools can do to support family involvement*. <http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/rb/rb3-Secondary.pdf>
- Harvard Family Research Project. (2007, Spring). *Family involvement in middle and high school students' education*. <http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/publications-series/family-involvement-makes-a-difference/family-involvement-in-middle-and-high-school-students-education>
- National Center for Family Literacy provides resources and linkages to adult literacy, GED and ESL programs focused on supporting families. <http://www.famlit.org/program-profiles/>

Center on Innovation & Improvement

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Information Tools Training

Positive results for students will come from changes in the knowledge, skill, and behavior of their teachers and parents. State policies and programs must provide the opportunity, support, incentive, and expectation for adults close to the lives of children to make wise decisions.

The Center on Innovation & Improvement helps regional comprehensive centers in their work with states to provide districts, schools, and families with the opportunity, information, and skills to make wise decisions on behalf of students.

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