

1. Attitude Check

This one-hour exercise is designed to explore and discuss staff and parent attitudes about working together and sharing responsibility. It's intended to spark discussion, not to force final decisions. Pick a neutral facilitator to lead the exercise.

Post four large pieces of paper around the room. Number them from 1 to 4.

- On #1 write: "Parents can do this on their own."
- On #2 write: "Parents can do this with active assistance from school staff."
- On #3 write: "Parents should do this with advice from school staff."
- On #4 write: "School staff should do this alone."

Ground Rules

1. Read aloud one of the statements in the list below. You can use three or four of the statements or make up your own. Ask participants to stand under the paper that expresses their view on that statement.
2. Ask participants to explain why they're standing where they are. They may try to win people over to their part of the room. Remind people that they can move to another part of the room if they change their mind.
3. Use a ball as a "floating microphone"—only the person holding the ball can speak. After some debate, proceed to another statement.
4. The facilitator should hold his or her comments until the end to encourage participant discussion. Participants should be encouraged to interpret the statements themselves and questions should be given a minimal response.

Statements

- Developing activities for classes
- Representing the school at meetings, conferences, and other events
- Setting the rules and regulations for the school
- Developing the budget for various activities
- Deciding on disciplinary action for staff and students
- Conducting staff training
- Planning trips
- Hiring staff
- Fund-raising (such as bake sales or candy sales)

Wrap-up

Mention key things that people said. Point out that there is no right or wrong answer. Explain that by stressing different works (such as *active assistance* versus *input*), you can see the different ways that schools can encourage or hinder parent involvement. Point out that the comments made, such as "It depends on the existing level of parent involvement in the school" or "What matters is the expertise the parents come in with," are exactly what people should think about when promoting engagement in schools. Also, highlight

issues around training needed for different types of parent involvement or other suggestions that may have come up during this discussion.

--Adapted from Advancing Youth Development Curriculum,
Youth Development Institute/Fund for the City of New York.

2. Conference Checklist

This checklist was developed by Melissa Whipple, the coordinator of the Parent Academic Liaison (PAL) program in San Diego, as a tool to help teachers prepare for conferences with families.

Before the conference

- ___ 1. **Notify parents and students about:**
 - Purpose
 - Place, time, length of time
 - Child care arrangements
 - Parent planning sheet (Questions to ask)

- ___ 2. **Prepare:**
 - Review student's folder
 - Gather samples of work
 - Gather input from students
 - Prepare materials
 - Think about what to say; avoid "educationese"

- ___ 3. **Plan agenda:**
 - Draw up a plan for the conference
 - Emphasize cooperation—what can both sides do?

- ___ 4. **Arrange environment:**
 - Place seating away from the desk
 - Make sure there will be privacy
 - See that things look welcoming and comfortable

During the conference

1. **Welcome.** Establish rapport.
2. **Set terms.** State the purpose, mention any time limits, encourage note taking, and mention options for follow-up.
3. **Lead with the positive.** Share what you see as the child's major strengths and unique qualities.
4. **Encourage.** Share information ("What do you think your child does well?") and invite comments and questions ("Do you have any questions for me?").
5. **Show.** Point out areas where there has been academic and social growth.
6. **Listen.** Pause and restate parents' words; look for verbal and nonverbal clues; invite questions.
7. **Develop an action plan.** Choose one or two areas on which to focus.
8. **Summarize.** Review the conversation and plan follow-up to check progress on the action plan.

9. **End on a positive note.** Express confidence in the child's ability to be a successful learner.

After the conference

- ___ 1. **Review** the conference with the child.
- ___ 2. **Share information** with other school staff, if needed.
- ___ 3. **Put it in writing**—send a follow-up note or letter.
- ___ 4. **Mark calendar** for planned follow-up.

3. Developing a Code of Conduct

This interactive process can ease tension and build broad agreement about student, staff, and parent conduct in and around the school.

Pick a safe place and a neutral facilitator to develop rules that will be accepted by the school community. Invite school staff, family members, student representatives, and community members to take part. Expect controversy.

Set ground rules to create a climate of respectful dialogue. Some suggestions:

- Everyone should be encouraged to speak and be heard.
- Listen when another person is talking—avoid side conversations.
- If you disagree with what someone is saying, express your point of view politely when it's your turn to speak.
- No one may insult another person.

Post these rules and ask for other ideas. When everyone agrees on the rules, start the process.

1. **Ask families, students, and staff what's important to them.** What rules would they like to set? The rules can cover a dress code, punctuality, music (what, when, and where it's appropriate to play), body art, makeup, and other aspects of style. Be prepared for rules about how teachers and staff should dress and be punctual and prepared. The rules should apply to everyone. Participants can discuss their ideas in small groups.
2. **Brainstorm proposed rules.** Write down each idea. After all the ideas are given, consolidate the duplicates.
3. **Set priorities.** Give everyone three to five colored dots to place on the proposed rules. They may put one dot on each rule they support, or put all their dots on one. Choose the rules that receive the most votes.
4. **Decide how to let people know about the rules and dress code, how they should be enforced, and what the penalties should be.** This can be done by committee or by another process similar to the one for setting the rules. Some schools will draft rules and circulate them for comment, then revise after the community has had its say. We think it's better to involve both parents and students at the start. The school council or other governance group should approve the final rules.
5. **Publish the rules, in print and on the school Web site.** Many schools publish the rules in a Code of Conduct handbook, which all teachers, families, and students receive at the beginning of the year.
6. **Determine a process for reviewing and modifying the Code of Conduct,** with participation from staff, students, families, and community members.

4. District Policy on Family-School Partnership

A district policy should be a statement of the district's commitment to the partnership concept. The policy also should be specific about how the district will support partnership, including providing on-site support and help from central office. These suggestions are modeled on the family involvement policy in San Diego public schools.

A strong policy should cover:

1. **Personnel policies that support partnership.** Cover how families may take part in staff selection, evaluation, promotion, and development. Specify expectations for the preparation of new teachers to work with families, contract time available for meeting with families, and rewards and incentives for partnership activities. We recommend that the policy support family liaison positions at each school (or at least each Title I school). Tool 5 is a job description for a family involvement coordinator.
2. **A partnership plan.** Require that every school appoint an action team and develop a plan for family-school partnership. Specify some mechanisms that schools should consider: family/parent centers, home visiting, action research teams, and mentoring programs.
3. **School-home communication.** Encourage varied approaches, such as class meetings, home visits, portfolio exhibitions, inter-active newsletters, cell phones for teachers, e-mail and Web sites, automated telephone systems, use of community media and facilities, and messages in families' home languages.
4. **Ground rules for agreements with health and social service providers.** Encourage school-linked service programs, and relationships with community agencies and institutions to offer community learning opportunities for children and families, including community service by students.
5. **District- and school-level decision making.** Set requirements and guidelines for planning, decision making, and school governance entities, including parent associations and school site councils.
6. **Learning materials for families.** Authorization and encouragement for teachers to provide guidance and learning materials to aid families in supporting the learning of their own children at home and the community.
7. **Business partnerships.** Suggest guidelines for developing and implementing partnerships with local business and industry.
8. **Adult and community education.** Set guidelines that regulate and encourage the use of school facilities for out-of-school-time programs.
9. **Parent choice.** Encourage parent choice for programs within schools, between schools, between districts, and with charter or alternative schools. Provide family/consumer information services.

To add items that will satisfy the requirements for a Title I district parent involvement policy under No Child Left Behind, go to www.ed.gov/programs/titleparta/parentinvguid.doc to see the Education Department's nonregulatory guidelines.

About the Process

San Diego's policy was developed by a task force of parent leaders, community representatives, and district staff. Meetings attracted wide interest in the community, with as many as twenty to thirty people attending. The process took a few months to develop, and the draft was then widely circulated to parent groups, community organizations, outside experts, and the teachers' union for comment.

The task force then prepared a final version for the superintendent to present for board approval, which included a request to establish and staff a parent involvement department. Jeana Preston, who facilitated the process, became the first director for parent and community involvement in the district after the policy was approved.

About the process, Preston comments, "As I recall, just about every word was discussed and negotiated, because when you want a clear, brief document without miles of explanation, individual words become powerful expression of intent." (To see the entire policy, go to www.sandi.net/parents/parent_facts.pdf.)

5. Family Involvement Coordinator Sample Job Description

This description lists seven major tasks that family involvement coordinators are expected to accomplish, along with some ideas for activities and programs to carry them out. The coordinator will need to enlist volunteers—it will take more than one person to do all these tasks well.

1. **Help the school to develop a family-friendly school climate. This should be done in cooperation with the principal, teachers, parent organization, and other staff. For example:**

- Conduct an annual "Welcoming School Walk-Through" with parents and teachers to make sure the school welcomes families and treats them with respect. (For more information about the walk-through, see Chapter 10.)
- Work with school staff to use the walk-through results to make improvements (e.g., signs, directions, greeting at front office, displays of student work, regular visiting hours).
- Create a comfortable family resource room where families can meet, get to know each other, and discuss their interests and concerns. Stock the family room with books, games, and learning materials that families can borrow.
- Develop a school family involvement policy with input and approval from parents and teachers. (To satisfy the requirements for a school parent involvement policy under Title I of No Child Left Behind, go to www.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/parentinguid.doc. For ideas on developing a policy, see tool 12.)

2. **Develop programs and activities designed to engage families in improving student achievement. Plan these in collaboration with an action team of families, teachers, parent organizations, business-community partners, and the principal. For example:**

- Design two family involvement programs/activities each quarter to help families participate more effectively in improving their children's learning. For example, family reading activities, math and science trainings, and career and college planning events. Use student achievement data to target skills that need to be strengthened.
- Help families understand standards and assessments, students test scores, rubrics, and the school report card.

- Facilitate and organize other parent meetings and workshops, as parents request.
- Collaborate with school staff, community members, partners and families to develop programs and activities geared to reach families who are underrepresented because of social, economic, racial, and/or language barriers.

3. Help teachers/staff and families develop strong partnerships and enhance communication between parents/families and school staff. For example:

- Encourage and support school staff to reach out to families. Create ways for families and teachers to meet face-to-face and to know each other, such as class meetings, breakfasts with the principal, and getting-to-know-you activities or PTA meetings.
- Develop monthly family contact logs for teachers with families' telephone numbers, so that teachers can be in touch with families at least once a month.
- Work with teachers and other staff to develop learning kits that families can take home to use with their children.
- Provide administrators, teachers, and support staff with research articles and handouts for parents. Staff can develop their own resource kits and notebooks with this material.
- Be a liaison between families and teachers when problems arise, more information needs to be shared, or cultural differences are a barrier.
- Develop a "room parent" or "department parent" (in middle and high schools) system to help teachers communicate important information and deadlines to parents.
- Arrange for translation and interpretation services for meetings, parent-teacher conferences, telephone calls, and notes home.
- Organize tours of the community for school staff to get know families and neighborhoods better and to identify families' concerns and ideas for improvement. (You might partner with parents and community organizations to help organize this event.)
- Communicate regularly with principal about parents' and families' ideas and concerns.

4. Develop and implement effective family involvement strategies and activities to empower students and their families. For example:

- Invite parents to participate in school committees and in the school's parent organization. Work with those groups to help them be welcoming and supportive of new members.
- Recruit parents to be a part of school/district decision-making committees and meetings. Be sure they have information and background materials to be informed members.
- Document parent/community activities through visual portfolios that include sign-in sheets, flyers, and pictures.
- Invite families to participate in professional development training along with staff.
- Ask parents to evaluate parent meetings and parent/family workshops.
- Survey families/school community and school personnel to assess the effectiveness of your school's partnership program.

5. Take part in opportunities for professional development. For example:

- Attend all meetings and training activities for family involvement coordinators and share ideas and experiences.
 - Keep school staff updated about family involvement activities in your school. For example, create a bulletin board about the activities, with pictures.
 - Maintain a portfolio of all major activities, with sign-in sheets and photographs.
 - Take advantage of professional development to learn new knowledge and skills.
 - Identify and take part in learning opportunities, such as conferences and meetings.
6. **Participate in and support district activities and programs for families. For example:**
- Work closely with district family involvement and community resources coordinator.
 - Help organize and recruit for district events and activities.
 - Publicize and promote district programs for families, such as advocacy workshops and literacy activities (as it applies to your school).
 - File quarterly reports on the family involvement activities at your school.
7. **Help to recruit partners to become part of the district's family involvement program. For example:**
- Reach out to local community groups and businesses to find out how they would like promote family involvement in your school.
 - Work with community partners and families to identify resources for families in the community. Make sure that teachers and counselors have up-to-date referral information on community services to give families.
 - Attend community meetings that will help you connect to community resources for families in your school.

Qualifications and skills:

- Understands class and cultural backgrounds of families and how to interpret culture of school to them
- Thinks and acts in ways that respect ethnic, cultural and language diversity
- Communicates successfully with teachers, families, administrators, and students (including being bilingual, if needed)
- Is computer-literate
- Has experience in collaborative leadership
- Displays interpersonal skills
- Advocates for children and parents
- Shows organizational skills
- Writes and speaks clearly and well

This job description was developed by Anne Henderson and Karen Parker Thompson, coordinator of family involvement and community resources for the Alexandria City Public Schools in Virginia, with advise from Jeana Preston of the Parent Center in San Diego.

6. Family Welcome Questionnaire

This questionnaire is designed to help school staff learn more about their students' families. We recommend that the questions below be asked face-to-face, rather than in a written survey. This can be done in several steps and places, such as when students enroll in the school, at the school open house, at parent-teacher conferences, and at parent activities. The family-school coordinator or parent liaison can do this, and community groups can help. **(It is important to emphasize that this information will be kept strictly confidential.)**

Dear Families:

Our school wants to know more about its families and their rich and interesting cultural heritage. With this information, the Family and Community Involvement Action Team can plan better programs to build on our students' home cultures. We also want to learn more about how families would like to help.

First, tell us about your cultural background:

- What languages are spoken in your home?
- In what country (or state) were you born?
- Tell us about your family's beliefs about the importance of education.
- What does your family do to help your children learn?
- What are your family's traditions? What activities do you do as a family? How do you celebrate birthdays and other important family events?
- Who is in your extended family (grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins, close friends)?

Second, tell us how you would like to be involved at home and at school, and what would help you be more involved.

- What are some ways you would like to be involved?
- What could the school do to help you be more involved?
- What are your working hours?
- When are the most convenient times for activities and meetings at school?
- What are your transportation needs?
- What are your hobbies, skills, talents, and interest?

Finally, tell us about your concerns, perspectives, and ideas:

- What would you like us to know about your child? What are his/her interests?
- What is working well for your child at school? What isn't?
- What are some ways you would like to school to recognize and teach about your child's cultures?
- Are there any ways that you feel your culture could be better respected at the school?
- Do you have some things that reflect your culture and background that you could share with us (for example, pictures, weavings, carvings, stories, musical instruments, songs, traditions, naming ceremonies)?
- How could you help the school reach out to other families in your community?

Many questions suggested here appear in Sabrina Hope King and A. Lin Goodwin, *Culturally Responsive Parent Involvement* (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, 2003). For a free copy, go to www.aacte.org/Publications/kinggoodwin.pdf.

7. Homework Survey

This survey was developed by staff at Wyman Elementary School in St. Louis, Missouri, in collaboration with students and faculty in the Education School at St. Louis University. A committee of teachers, the parent coordinator, and administrators used the results to plan activities for families and design learning materials that families can use at home. The following questions were designed to find out several things about what families do at home to support and encourage children's learning:

1. When parents are available to help with homework
2. What children do after school
3. What control and structure parents exercise over homework
4. How aware of homework parents are on a daily basis
5. Parents' experience of and attitudes toward homework
6. Supports parents would like in order to help their children with homework

Survey Questions:

1. Is a parent home after school? Yes No
2. Do parent(s) work outside the home? Yes No
3. What time do parents get home after work? 1-3:30 P.M. 4-6 P.M. 6:15-7:30 P.M.
 7:45 P.M.-8:00 A.M.
4. What do children do after school? (Circle all that apply)
Study Practice music Watch TV Play
Do chores (list) _____
(Tip: use pictures to show choices)
5. Do you have a set time for homework?
 Yes Sometimes No
6. Do your children do their homework together?
 Yes Sometimes No
7. Is homework done in the same place every day?
 Yes Sometimes No
8. How many times do you have to tell your children to do their homework?
 3+ 2 1 none
9. How do you know when your children have homework?
 I ask They tell me Teacher sends home a schedule

10. Does your child have time at school to do homework?
 Yes Sometimes No
11. Where are you when homework is being done?
 Close by In house At work
 Other _____
12. What are you (or other adult) doing while child is doing homework?
 Helping child Preparing food
 Cleaning house Watching TV
 Other _____
13. Do you think your kids are just like you were about homework?
 No
 Yes, I usually enjoyed my homework
 Yes, I usually hated doing homework
14. When I was in school, I had someone to help me with homework.
 Yes Sometimes No
15. Who helped you?
 Parent Other relative Older child
 Someone else _____
16. Do you have a high school diploma or a GED?
 Yes No
17. If no, would you like to obtain a GED? Yes No
18. What do you need to help your children with their homework?
19. Which types of homework do you like to help with? (Circle all that apply.)
History Math Reading English Science Art Building things
20. Which ones do you *not* like to help with? (Circle all that apply.)
History Math Reading English Science Art Building things
21. In which subjects would you like to improve your skills? (Circle all that apply.)
History Math Reading English Science Art Building things

8. Needs Assessment Survey

This survey is based on one in the Boston Public Schools to find out from parents what help they would like to support their children's learning.

Dear Parents and Families:

We'd like to hear from you about how we can help you support your child's learning. Please use this checklist to tell us where you could use extra information, advice, and guidance from our school staff. Check as many boxes below as you wish.

For all grades:

Academics:

- Helping my child with reading
- Helping my child with writing
- Helping my child with math
- Helping my child with other subjects _____

Homework and out-of-school time:

- Helping my child to complete homework
- Helping my child with how to manage time
- Helping my child perform well on the [name of state test]

Motivation and behavior:

- Helping my child with his/her attitude about school
- Helping my child improve behavior at school and at home
- Helping my child with social relationships and peer pressure

Other Supports:

Add for middle and high school students:

Planning for the future:

- Helping my child with college and career planning
- Helping my child choose courses and programs

9. Parent Review

This review consists of questions to ask parents about their children's interests and talents, strengths and fears. It also asks parents to provide a personal message about their child, if they wish to. This can be done as an interview, which we recommend, or a survey form. An interview builds the personal relationship and will yield more information. For parents with limited English or formal education, an interview in their home language is a must.

Tell us about your child

- Who is your child's best friend?
- What does your child like about school?
- What are your child's successes in school? What are your child's challenges in school?
- Does your child feel liked and accepted at school? If not, why not?
- What are some of your child's interests and hobbies?
- What does your child feel is his/her greatest talent or skill? Do you agree?
- Does your child enjoy reading and being read to?
- Does your child enjoy doing math?
- What challenges does your child have in math/in reading?
- Is there anything you want me to know about your child?
- What does your child want to do and be when he/she grows up?
- What are some of your child's favorite activities?
- What chores does your child like to do?

Follow-up

- How should we stay in touch about how your child is doing?
- Please let me know how to contact you:
- Here is my contact information:

Final Question

- Please tell me about your hopes and dreams for your child this year.
(Please write it here, or contact me.)

(Note to teacher: When you ask this final question, be quiet and really listen. Then paraphrase what the parent has said, to make sure you understand each other. Some of the other questions could be used during any silences. The point is to provide parents ways of offering information that would be of help to the teacher, as well to create a positive way to focus on the child.)

This review was developed with advice from Melissa Whipple, the director of the Parent Academic Liaison program in San Diego.

10. Parent Volunteer Survey

This survey was designed by East Boston High School to find out how parents would like to contribute to the high school and to learn about what would encourage them to come to the school.

Dear Families:

[Name of school] and its Family Center are conducting this survey to better serve parents, with the ultimate goal of improving your student's and family's education.

Parent's Name _____ **Student's Name** _____

Address _____

Phone # _____ E-mail address _____

Work phone, cell phone, beeper, etc. _____

What are the best times for you to come to the school?

- Mornings Afternoons Evenings Weekends

[Name of school] encourages parent involvement. Would you like to be involved with the school?

- Yes No

If yes, check what you would feel comfortable doing:

- Make phone calls to other parents Classroom speaker/assistant
 Help out in the offices or library
 Work on important school topics Attend field trips
 Help plan events Join school site council
 Other _____

Is there anything that prevents you from becoming involved that we could help you with?

- Getting excused from work, work hours Child care
 Transportation issues Interpretation needed
 Other _____

Do you know how much time high school students should spend on homework each day?

What do you think is the correct answer?*

- 1 hour 1 ½ hours 2 ½ hours

Are you worried about your son or daughter passing the state test?

- Yes No

What do you need to know about the state test? _____

Students and families have many talents. What can you share with [name of school]?

- Cooking Language spoken Art Computer skills
 Sewing Trade skills (such as carpentry) Music
 Other _____

What is your opinion of [name of school]? _____

Would you like to be notified of various meetings and events?

- Yes No

What is the best way to notify you? Call on phone

- Mail a letter home Put notices in the newspaper

Do you mind if you are called at work for these notices?

Yes, call me No, not at work

Work telephone number _____

Best time to reach you at home _____

If the school offered classes, what would you be interested in?

Computers General education

English as a Second Language College/advanced level courses

Job skills (interviewing, resume writing)

How to help my student succeed at school

Parent training (such as Leadership Academy, Title I, workshops, other workshops)

Other _____

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Please return to the homeroom teacher or mail/fax to: [Family Center Coordinator's name, address of school, telephone number, fax number]

* The correct time is _____ hours. (East Boston High recommends 2 ½ hours.) If you do not see your student spending time on homework, ask both the student and teacher why. The school administration needs to know if there is a problem with students not doing homework or teachers not giving it/correcting it.

11.School Climate Survey

This tool can be used to develop an action plan, to plan activities for staff and families, and to set priorities for the school improvement team, school council, or other committees.

Dear Families:

We want our school to be the best it can be. Please fill out this survey and tell us what you think are the school's strong points and what you think could be better. Your comments and ideas will be very welcome. If you would like to help tally and analyze the results, please let us know.

--The Family and Community Involvement Action Team
[list names and contact information]

Caring Environment

1. When I walk into this school, I feel welcome.

<input type="radio"/> Always	<input type="radio"/> Almost always	<input type="radio"/> Sometimes
<input type="radio"/> Rarely	<input type="radio"/> Never	

2. I am treated with respect at this school.

<input type="radio"/> Always	<input type="radio"/> Almost always	<input type="radio"/> Sometimes
<input type="radio"/> Rarely	<input type="radio"/> Never	

3. This school respects my cultural heritage.

<input type="radio"/> Always	<input type="radio"/> Almost always	<input type="radio"/> Sometimes
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Rarely Never

4. Students at my child's school are treated fairly no matter what their race or cultural background.
 Always Almost always Sometimes
 Rarely Never

5. I feel welcome at PTA/parent group meetings.
 Always Almost always Sometimes
 Rarely Never

Problem Solving

6. I have a good working relationship with my child's teacher.
 Always Almost always Sometimes
 Rarely Never

7. I can talk to the school principal when I need to.
 Always Almost always Sometimes
 Rarely Never

8. This school has a clear process for addressing my concerns.
 Always Almost always Sometimes
 Rarely Never

9. If the school can't help me, I know they will refer me to someone who can.
 Always Almost always Sometimes
 Rarely Never

Communication

10. My child's teacher lets me know right away if my child is having a problem with (circle all that apply):
Behavior
Fitting in with other students
Homework
Special projects
Tests

11. It's easy to get a translator if I need one.
 Always Almost always Sometimes
 Rarely Never

12. Staff at my child's school consult me and other families before making important decisions.
 Always Almost always Sometimes
 Rarely Never

13. I understand the rules and requirements about student dress, language, and behavior.

- Always Almost always Sometimes
 Rarely Never

Student Progress

14. My child's teacher keeps me well informed about how my child is doing in school.

- Always Almost always Sometimes
 Rarely Never

15. I understand the standards my child is supposed to meet.

- Always Almost always Sometimes
 Rarely Never

16. My child's teacher and the school give me useful information about how to improve my child's progress.

- Always Almost always Sometimes
 Rarely Never

17. At this school, students feel challenged to do their best.

- Always Almost always Sometimes
 Rarely Never

Satisfaction

18. I am very satisfied with the quality of this school.

- Always Almost always Sometimes
 Rarely Never

19. I would recommend this school to family and friends with children.

- Always Almost always Sometimes
 Rarely Never

What grade is your child in? List all if you have more than one child in the school? _____

My child is (check only one box):

- African American
 Asian American
 Caucasian/White
 Latin American/Hispanic
 Native American
 Other (please specify) _____

What is the school doing that is most helpful to you as a parent? _____

Share one thing that you wish the school would do to improve the learning experience for you and your child.

Thank you for your participation.

Please return this survey to:

This survey is adapted from one used in Alexandria, Virginia, public schools in 2003. It was developed by Karen Parker Thompson, coordinator of family involvement and community resources for the Alexandria City Public Schools, Anne T. Henderson, and Scott Broetzmann of Customer Care Management and Consulting.

12. Tips for Developing a School Family Involvement Policy

A policy commits a school to certain goals and actions. A family involvement policy describes effective partnership between the school and its families, and lays out how and when that will happen and who will do what.

What Questions Should Your Policy Answer?

- What is the school's vision of the importance of working closely with families?
- How will the school be family-friendly?
- In what ways will teachers be expected to communicate with families on student progress?
- How will the school build personal relationships with families?
- How will the school honor families' contributions and build on their strengths?
- How will the school work with families to improve student achievement, and what does the school expect families to do?
- How will the school help and support families to do what's expected?

What Should the Policy Include?

1. **A vision statement** that says what the school community believes about the importance of family-school partnership to high student achievement.
2. **Specific steps** that the school and families will take to work as partners to improve achievement, such as a school-family compact, family learning activities, personal learning plans, and student support teams. Include indicators to look for as evidence that the school is really doing this.
3. **Terms of engagement**, such as times for parents to observe in classrooms, availability of interpreters and translation, principal's office hours, opportunities for parent-teacher communication, and so on.

4. **An indication of who will be responsible** for carrying out the policy, including school staff, parents, and community members.
5. **Resources**, such as funding, space, equipment, and staff time and positions.

The policy also needs to spell out how it will be developed, promoted, and assessed:

- How parents, school staff, community members, and students will be involved in developing and approving the policy
- Guidelines for measuring whether the policy is working, such as increased parent involvement in school activities and improved student attendance
- How parents, school staff, and community members will learn about what the policy says

Steps to Develop a Policy

1. Bring together an action team that represents the people who will carry out the policy, including parent leaders who reflect the diverse families in the school.
2. Find out how families and school staff want to work together to improve achievement. What they are interested in doing and learning about? What supports do they need? Focus groups, surveys, and interviews are good ways to do this.
3. Revise the existing policy to respond to current needs and interests. Focus on action—what needs to happen and when.

What Practices Should a Policy Promote?

Above all, the policy must focus on improving student achievement. The research on family involvement and student achievement finds that these practices can improve student learning:

- Being family-friendly—staff are warm, helpful, and welcoming to families of all backgrounds, and form relationships with families through one-to-one and small group contact
- Offering activities and programs for families that are clearly linked to improving achievement
- Providing opportunities for families to volunteer or contribute both at home and at school
- Informing families through workshops and other activities on how to improve their children's learning.
- Bridging cultural differences by understanding families' home cultures, identifying their strengths and assets, and making sure all have chances to contribute
- Encouraging families to be effective advocates for their children: help them take more challenging classes and plan for postsecondary education and a career
- Building the capacity of teachers, parents, and other school staff to work together through training and professional development

Sample Sections of an Elementary School Policy

Vision

Parents are their children's first and most important teachers. Research tells us that parent involvement makes a big difference. When schools welcome families, establish personal relationships among families and staff, help parents understand how the system works, and encourage family-staff collaboration to improve student achievement, students do better in school—and the schools get better.

Our school is committed to being family-friendly and to working as partners with our families to help *all* our students learn to high levels. Our school encourages families to be:

- Teachers of their children at home
- Supporters of our school and of public education
- Advocates for their own and other children
- Decision makers in school policy and practice