

Assessing Existing Parent Involvement

A Checklist of the Differing Levels of Involvement

Schools often judge the effectiveness of their parent involvement by the degree of fundraising activities that occur, the percentage of parent attendance at parent/teacher conferences, and the number of parents coming to school open houses. Many parents, however, do not engage with these traditional methods of parent involvement due to conflicting demands on their times, past negative experiences with the educational setting, and their own feelings of competency.

Review of research and Best Practices by Michigan State University has shown that parent involvement needs occur at differing levels for different families. As not all families can participate at the same level, it is important to have varying levels of engagement at your school. Levels include:

- Communication to and from Parents
- Partnership in Student Learning
- Parent Volunteers
- Parents Using the School as a Resource
- Parents as Decision Makers

The following assessment tool is an excerpt adapted from an assessment tool developed by Outreach Partnerships, Michigan State University. The purpose of the tool is to provide buildings with a checklist to easily assess a building's parent involvement related to the above-mentioned levels. (Excerpt reprinted with permission from: Parent Involvement In School, Best Practice Brief No. 30, Outreach Partnerships, Michigan State University. Entire original document can be found at <http://outreach.msu.edu/bpbriefs/issues/brief30.pdf>).

LEVEL 1

Communication To and From Parents

The effective school keeps parents informed through regular two-way communication. Sharing of information vital to student success is facilitated by the activities outlined below.

	YES		NO	
	OK	Could Improve	Could Do It	Not Possible Now
An early conference prior to school start or during first weeks enables parents to communicate information about their child's characteristics and their desired goals.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Contracts between the school and each parent are developed that include agreements concerning expectations for the child's progress, parental provision of a place to study, and a commitment to talk daily about school tasks, pay attention to academic progress, and compliment gains.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parents know how to reach teachers directly.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teachers encourage parents to let them know what is happening in the child's life that may affect school performance.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Principal and teachers set aside a small amount of time each day and use all possible means to communicate frequently with parents, using as appropriate:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Letters by mail.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
E-mail.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Telephone.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Face-to-face.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A homework log gives the parent instructions for facilitating homework and incomplete schoolwork.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Principal and teachers have established a regular schedule for positive communications to parents:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Celebration notes on positive things that have happened.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Folders of completed student work are sent home weekly or monthly for parents to review and return with comments.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Communications emphasize strengths and how the parents can help.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Report cards and regular progress reports are sent, or given, to parents.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	YES		NO	
	OK	Could Improve	Could Do It	Not Possible Now
Communication process is modified as needed for non-English-speaking or low-literacy parents.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Conferences with every parent are held at least twice a year with follow-ups as needed, and at times when parents can attend.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Principal and teachers schedule a home visit to all children during the year, giving priority to those children and parents who are new to the school and those children where there is an immediate concern.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
For low-income families and families in some cultures, offering home visits is more successful at involving parents than programs requiring parents to visit the school. However, when parents do become involved at school, their children make even greater gains.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Children and staff collaborate on classroom newsletters that provide information about school activities, policies and schedules, an opportunity to answer questions and elicit suggestions, and information on community resources and family activities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The school provides parents with clear information on class level achievement expectations, school activities, school policies, discipline procedures, assessment tools, and school goals.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The school promotes informal activities that facilitate the interaction of parents and staff.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The school conducts an annual person-to-person survey of families on students' needs and families' suggestions and reactions to school programs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A special effort is made to reach parents not normally involved.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The school provides staff development on effective communication techniques.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

The school's practices to inform and involve parents are stronger determinants of whether inner-city parents will be involved with their children's education than are parent education, family size, marital status, and student grade level.

When parents receive frequent and effective communication from the school, their involvement increases, their overall evaluation of educators improves, and their attitudes toward the school are more positive.

LEVEL 2

Partnership in Student Learning

The effective school views parents as partners in facilitating children’s learning and enables them in various ways.

	YES		NO	
	OK	Could Improve	Could Do It	Not Possible Now
Parents are given information and orientation/training on:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
○ Required skills in all subjects at each grade.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
○ Homework policies and how to monitor and discuss schoolwork at home.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
○ How to assist children with skills that they will be developing.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
○ How sufficient sleep, nutritious food, limited TV, discussion at meals together, and a quiet place to study can improve academic performance.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parents participate with teachers in helping children set academic goals each year.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teachers have a regular schedule of interactive homework that requires children to demonstrate to and discuss with parents what they are learning in school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The school library has preschool and elementary books that parents can borrow to read to and discuss with their young children.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Parents are much more likely to become involved when educators encourage and assist parents in helping their children with schoolwork, when they are treated as partners and given relevant information by people with whom they are comfortable, parents put into practice the involvement strategies they already know are effective, but have been hesitant to utilize.

Parent effectiveness is enhanced when the school provides orientation/training; for example, written directions with a send-home instructional packet, workshops where parents participate in constructing and using instructional games, or training and ongoing supervision by school personnel.

LEVEL 3

Parent Volunteers

The effective school stretches its resources by encouraging parents to volunteer. Parent volunteers have traditionally been stay-at-home mothers. However, there may be other possibilities, including arrangements with FIA to define consistent part-time volunteering as a “work” activity for women moving from welfare to work.

The precondition for parent volunteers is a welcoming school.

	YES		NO	
	OK	Could Improve	Could Do It	Not Possible Now
The school encourages participation:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provides clear instructions including a volunteer orientation packet.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Creates ways to express appreciation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parents accompany classes on field trips.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parents volunteer to extend the capacities of staff by:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tutoring or serving as a teacher’s aide in the classroom.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bringing their talents, skills, knowledge, experiences, or unique culture to the classroom as guest instructors.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Monitoring in the cafeteria and on the playground during lunchtime.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parents volunteer to improve the school environment or equipment.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parent teams welcome and orient new families at the beginning and during the year.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parents volunteer in a telephone tree to provide all families with school-related information.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parents volunteer to organize and manage resources under Level 5.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parents have the use of a room as a place for volunteers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

LEVEL 4

The School as a Resource for Parents

The effective school connects to parents by serving as a resource, becoming a full service school. The full service school is a logical extension of the welcoming school and the school as part of the community. The school provides access to resources identified by parents as important to families.

	YES		NO	
	OK	Could Improve	Could Do It	Not Possible Now
The school is available for meetings of community groups.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The principal and teachers may link family to needed resources, especially if children are frequently absent because of illness or family issues.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Children can have breakfast at school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The school houses a clothing exchange.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parents and school staff agree on and put into effect a plan of action to contain community problems such as traffic safety, drug dealing, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

LEVEL 5

Parents as Decision Makers

Effective schools have access to financial resources and a team of administrators, teachers, and parents makes decisions.

	YES		NO	
	OK	Could Improve	Could Do It	Not Possible Now
Parents participate in review of proposed school policies and curriculum as part of parent organization committees or principal-appointed advisory committees.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parents participate on all decision making and advisory committees:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Committees meet at times convenient for parents.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Use of technology permits parents to participate offsite.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	YES		NO	
	OK	Could Improve	Could Do It	Not Possible Now
The school provides parents with an understandable, well-publicized process for influencing decisions, raising issues or concerns, appealing decisions, and resolving problems.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Training is provided to staff and parents on shared decision making.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

The more the relationship between parents and educators approaches a comprehensive, well-planned partnership, the higher the student achievement. Partnering requires give-and-take conversation, goal setting for the future, and regular follow-up interactions.

**Policies, Procedures, Contracts, and Handbooks:
Reviewing Language that Fosters/Hinders a Welcoming Parent Environment, and
Examining District Policies, Handbooks/Communication,
Missions, Procedures, and Practices**

Below is a list of questions related to the policy and procedural structure of the district’s view of parent involvement. The greater number of “yes” answers marked on this checklist, the closer a district is toward having a structure for effective parent involvement.

Question	Yes	No
<p>Is there a specific Board of Education policy that addresses the importance of a school/parent partnership for student success in school? If yes, does this policy and its subsequent procedures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish parent involvement as a district priority? • Direct the Superintendent to establish the means by which parent involvement is fostered and maintained at the building and district level? • Speak to an on-going process of involvement that actively seeks to engage all families of the district in different ways? • Speak to involving parents across the different levels of parent involvement, which are supported by research? 		
Does the professional development plan for the district include continuous improvement of all staff regardless of role related to more effective parent involvement?		
Are staff given time and financial resources, to implement parent involvement policies and procedures more effectively?		
Does the facility use policy to make it easy for parent involvement events to occur outside of normal school hours and sports game nights?		
Does the facility use policy to form a fee structure that encourages the use of district buildings by parents?		
<p>Do policies and procedures related to district goals and priorities, school environment, curriculum development, administrator hiring, communication structures (i.e., phone system), school security, parental rights and responsibilities, etc., seek and encourage:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parental input in the development, implementation and review of district policy/procedure? • Parents to be part of district and building advisory and decision-making teams, as appropriate? 		

Question	Yes	No
<p>Do school improvement teams:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule their meetings at times when parent representatives can attend? • Work to actively gain input from parents who traditionally aren't engaged? • Use technology or other means of communication to connect and involve parents who aren't physically present at a meeting (i.e., conference call, email updates, etc.)? 		
<p>Do policies and procedures reference District staff's role in fostering parent involvement (including non-certified staff)?</p>		
<p>Do student handbooks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have an opening section that invites parents to become engaged, and provide ways in which they can become engaged? • Speak to the importance of parents in children's school success? • Address how parents can help promote positive occurrences at schools vs. the parent's responsibility in students' disciplinary actions or missing school? • Provide a balance between inviting/positive language and language that is controlling and directing? Is there a balance between terms like parents are "invited" or "encouraged" and terms like parents "must" or "expected to?" • Have printings in the languages spoken by student's families? 		
<p>Does contract language allow parent volunteers to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist with after school enrichment activities that support and/or supplement the curriculum? • Assist in classrooms, media center and the office? 		
<p>Does contract language regarding extra-curricular assignments and pay reflect a staff member's leadership of established building parent involvement committees?</p>		
<p>Does contract language speak to staff being involved in parent engagement activities outside of the normal school day and at locations other than district buildings (home visits, parent/teacher conference times and locations)?</p>		
<p>Does a parent handbook exist that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gives parents initial information that fosters a home/school partnership? • Uses collaborative, welcoming language vs. directing, controlling language? 		

Source: Developed by the Michigan Department of Education from parent and school district administrator interviews, and reviewed by the Michigan Association of School Boards staff

Parent Involvement/Engagement Rubric

The below rubric was designed to provide school districts with a clear understanding of how parents are involved in the development, implementation and evaluation of instructional programs at the building level. The level of involvement can be explicitly described including how parental input will be utilized and valued throughout the instructional initiative.

This may provide a useful tool as school personnel and community members mark the attributes, which reflect their perception of the school district.

Marginal Engagement	Active Participant in Decision Making	Exemplary Collaboration
The district's parental involvement plan:	The district's parental involvement plan:	The district's parental involvement plan:
Successful Partnerships		
Sets policies that give the impression schools belong to school personnel and parents are not encouraged to interfere through the use of explicit or implicit communication.	Sets policies that give the impression parents may become involved in the school in limited ways. Communication speaks only to these limited ways.	Sets policies where school personnel actively encourage parents to become involved in establishing goals, planning and a wide variety of ways through all forms of communication.
Establishes guidelines where parents are spectators and their responsibility ends with the delivery of the child to school. School personnel report to families about school decisions.	Establishes procedures where parents expect to help establish guidelines and have a reciprocal report structure that allows parents and school personnel to interact easily and frequently.	Establishes numerous methods by which parents can become involved in their children's education both at home and school, recognizing family differences, schedules and cultures. School personnel listen to parents and value their insight on how best to work together.
Directs school personnel to determine all education program goals, rules, and guidelines without consultation of parents.	Assigns responsibility to Parent Teacher Organization leaders to serve on any ad-hoc committees.	Describes a well-designed education community committee, which meets year around with responsibilities divided across a multi-year commitment.

Marginal Engagement	Active Participant in Decision Making	Exemplary Collaboration
The district's parental involvement plan:	The district's parental involvement plan:	The district's parental involvement plan:
Provides little evidence of avenues for the development of mutual respect between parents and school personnel.	Describes structures that promote mutual respect between parents and school personnel.	Provides examples of and describes structures that promote mutual respect between parents and school personnel.
Welcoming Environment		
Uses signage, which may intimidates parents.	Uses signage to welcome parents.	Uses signage to welcome and guide parents to spaces designed to encourage parents' and families' interactions at school.
Demonstrates that the primary source of authority is the school and its designated personnel.	Describes plans for shared authority between parents and school personnel.	Provides exhibits that the authority for decisions is shared between parent representatives and school personnel.
Encourages parents to sit on ad-hoc committees.	Encourages parent organizations to have a representative on planning and other ad-hoc committees.	Expects participation and provides support that assures parents are on planning, ad-hoc, and evaluation committees.
Provides limited information regarding indicators of student progress and assessment to communicate student achievement to parents.	Describes vague uses for standardized assessment tools to communicate student progress to parents.	Uses specific formative and summative assessment tools to communicate student progress to parents.
Support for Home Learning		
Does not specify a process for allowing parents to gain information about involvement in instructional programs	Provides descriptions of instructional that are available through the school, along with a timeline, and school policies.	Describes the process of parents and school personnel working to develop instructional programs and support for learning at home.
Provides little descriptive information regarding selection and distribution process of support resources.	Demonstrates how instructional support materials are selected based on student assessment performance and sent home to extend learning through practice.	Identifies family survey activities that provide current family information to support selection of materials for extended learning and practice at home.

Marginal Engagement	Active Participant in Decision Making	Exemplary Collaboration
The district's parental involvement plan:	The district's parental involvement plan:	The district's parental involvement plan:
Communication		
Assures that parents receive communication from school personnel.	Periodically reviews the school's communication policy for effectiveness.	Intentionally utilizes multiple media types for communicating with school families and community service organizations.
Parent Teacher Conferences		
Sets Parent Teacher Conferences with little consideration of the needs of families.	Provides flexible scheduling for parent teacher conferences during the day and evening hours.	Utilizes a parent survey to gain information about the availability of the schools' families and maximizes teachers' availability for conference scheduling.
Provides minimal privacy or accommodations when communicating with parents.	Articulates a plan for engaging parents in a meaningful manner when waiting for appointed conference time.	Periodically reviews the physical space to assess privacy and comfort of participants during parent teacher conferences.

Source: Basis for this rubric was adapted from Henderson, A.T., & Berla, N. (Eds.) (1994). A new generation of evidence: The family is critical to student achievement. Washington, D.C.: National Committee for Citizens in Education.