

Teachers and staff need to focus on proximal reading, math, and science strategies, (i.e. those that impact students directly in the classroom). Parent involvement, while important, is a distal strategy which should be integrated into the instructional strategies training. An example of how to do this might be to have teachers take 30 minutes during a training session to identify some basic activities they could encourage parents to do to enhance at home the impact of the strategy students are experiencing at school. Or collaborative teams might identify one team member to design an activity that could be sent to parents to support the particular knowledge or skill student data is showing to be a problem area. Math and Parent Partnerships (MAPPS) is a pre-designed program where teachers hold workshops for parents to give them hands-on experience with the math content and activities their children are learning in school. Parents then understand and can support the way their child is learning math. Because teachers do not have to design the workshops themselves, their professional development time stays focused on learning instructional strategies they can use in the classroom rather than designing workshops for parents.

Selecting a Family Engagement Action Team (FEAT)

Parent involvement that impacts student achievement goes well beyond parents attending parent-teacher conferences, serving as a room parent, or volunteering to chaperone school dances. Parents are already engaged in helping their children learn in a variety of ways. Schools need to identify what parents are already doing to support their children's learning in order to help families align those efforts to what students are expected to learn in school.

A Family Engagement Action Team (FEAT) can assist the school in forming and sustaining critical partnerships with families and the community. The team can also be a knowledgeable resource to help assess the district's/building's current parent/family involvement practices, develop new options for on-going two-way communication, and collaborate to determine if the partnerships are making a difference.

Selecting Team Members

Communities are made up of a variety of overlapping groups of citizens who come from diverse backgrounds with differing family profiles, have a variety of educational experiences, attend different churches, work in the community, or commute to another community. Family Engagement Action Team members should represent the diversity of the community to generate a broad range of ideas on what family engagement might mean to all parents in the community.



TOOL 1.1 COMMUNITY PROFILE OF THE SCHOOL DISTRICT

One tool to help you identify your subgroups of parents/families is the Community Profile of the School District which has been designed by Iowa State University Extension and Iowa Statewide PIRC. To get the Profile in a print-ready form for your district, go to www.iowaparents.org and select “Community Profiles.”

The Profile is based on data from several identified sources and is intended to give you accurate data on your community. In all cases, you will want to consider any significant factors which may have occurred in your community since the time the data were collected.

Using the Profile data, identify the various groups that need to be represented on your team. The team should include school staff such as teachers, counselors, nurses, and administrators, but school staff should not also be counted as the “parents” on the team. The team needs parents who are not already connected with the school in some way to get an objective perspective of parent needs. Examples of parent and community members will most likely represent the following kinds of community groups:

- Families (e.g., traditional families, blended families, multi-generation families, etc.)
- Churches, synagogues, mosques, etc.
- Social service agencies
- Refugee center
- Labor unions
- Major community employers
- Neighborhood associations
- Other groups that are represented in your community

Identifying People of Influence within Each Subgroup

Within each of the groups who need to be involved in designing activities to increase family engagement in student learning, identify the “people of influence.” This work is too important to rely on volunteers. You need to ask individuals to be on the team who are sometimes called the “movers and shakers” or the “key communicators” within each subgroup to be on the team.

The “key communicators” are the “E.F. Hutton’s” of the subgroup. Remember the commercial, “When E. F. Hutton talks, everybody listens!” Those are the people you want on your team as they are the trusted sources of information. In most cases, they are “key champions” for a sub-group of people who turn to them for accurate information as to how innovations or complex activities will impact them personally.

People of influence, or key communicators, are important partners to help you design clear and accurate messages about the importance of family involvement and how it can impact students' achievement. They will also be involved in delivering information to the groups they influence.

To identify these critical leaders, ask, "Who are the trusted sources of information in the parents' eyes?" Ask the same questions for the teachers in your building and the community.

It is important in identifying people of influence to not be misled by titles of authority. Just because someone is the "principal" or the "lead interpreter" or is well liked, may not mean he/she is a person of influence. Also, remember that a person may be influential in one area, such as technology or health issues, but not in others, such as family needs. Do not be afraid to include some individuals who may have been negative in the past toward the school or family involvement if you see them as people of influence. Through learning and contributing to the team of their peers, they may become a powerful positive influence, or perhaps simply more neutral about the topic.



TOOL 1.2 SAMPLE QUESTIONS TO IDENTIFY PEOPLE OF INFLUENCE (with a SAMPLE INFLUENCE MAP)

Develop an Influence Map

Using the people of influence you have identified, develop a map outlining who each person influences or communicates with on a regular basis. Even if you decide not to include all of the people of influence on your team, it will be important to communicate with them regularly and make sure they understand the messages the Family Engagement Action Team (FEAT) has decided to communicate about family involvement. The ideal situation will be that they support your message and communicate it to those they influence, or at least be neutral about the message.

Here Is How It Works

Ms. Eden, who immigrated to the United States five years ago from Bosnia, has children in the pre-kindergarten, second-, and fifth-grade classrooms in your school. You know she communicates with other Bosnian families who have children in those classrooms and is seen as a "leader" and confidant by them. Although she does not communicate regularly with Bosnian families who have children in other classrooms, your hunch is that they know who she is, respect her, and would listen to her about how they could be more involved in their children's education. Ms. Eden is a person of influence with the families from Bosnia whose children attend your school.

She is also a person of influence with Ms. Hoover, the school principal, and Ms. Willoughby, a teacher. Ms. Willoughby has influence over four other teachers, as shown in the example.

If Ms. Eden is selected to be a member of the Family Engagement Action Team (FEAT) and agrees with the messages the team decides to deliver about family involvement, she will be able to influence other families, Ms. Willoughby, and Ms. Hoover to listen to the messages in a positive manner and, hopefully, implement them. Ms. Hoover and Ms. Willoughby, will most likely influence the groups with whom they interact to be positive about family involvement messages.

Creating a Welcoming Environment

If your goal is to have a team as diverse as your school community, it is important to consider the needs of the individuals who will be participating on the team. To increase your team's success, help the members feel welcome, as if they were a guest in your home. Provide opportunities for them to get to know one another as individuals who all care about the success of their children and who want to be contributing members of the community as a whole and the school in particular. For many cultures, including our own, sharing food is an important part of relationship building. Take time for breaks that allow team members to visit freely with each other.

For some, child care may be a critical barrier to participation. Provide opportunities for them to bring their children so they can also enjoy playing together and developing friendships. Often high school Family and Consumer Science classes or parenting classes can develop activities for the children as part of their hands-on classroom projects. County Extension 4-H groups and other youth organizations are also often looking for opportunities for youth to practice a variety of skills which may include childcare.

Make sure that someone on the staff follows any written meeting notices with a personal invitation to attend Family Engagement Action Team (FEAT) meetings. Follow-up face-to-face conversations or telephone calls between meetings will also help to develop strong personal relationships and help everyone feel more comfortable in being active participants in the process.

WELCOMING TEAM MEMBERS

- Plan opportunities for team members to get to know one another.
- Encourage team members to bring a friend if they seem uncomfortable.
- Consider meeting outside of the school, perhaps in a community center or a neutral location.
- Provide team members with opportunities to have an interpreter available.
- Offer transportation or assistance in setting up car pools if necessary.
- Share a positive quality about each team member in introductions—or have other team members share qualities of individuals with whom they have become acquainted.

Knowledge-base Team Building

Team building accomplishes several purposes. One purpose was mentioned above—to help people feel comfortable in their relationships with others so they will feel free to share their ideas openly and enjoy the process.

Another aspect of team building is developing a knowledge base of the content being addressed in team meetings. At this stage of the process it is not important that everyone have a thorough knowledge of effective family engagement practices. However, you do want team members to develop a common idea of the general direction the team will be heading.



TOOL 1.3 BACKGROUND INFORMATION RESOURCES

The two resources listed below are quick reads which could be used as part of a meeting agenda to trigger new ways of thinking about family engagement in the school.

- ***Including Every Parent*** is a case study of a successful program of parent involvement at O'Hearn Elementary School in Boston. It illustrates a comprehensive program of parent engagement in one building.
- ***Parents and Learning*** is a booklet designed to provide an overview of proven practices in parent engagement. It also provides a big picture of the paradigm shift to engagement, not just involvement.

You should choose the resource that best fits the time team members have available and the format that best helps them understand the shifting paradigm of Parent Involvement.

In both cases, be sure that the team is clear that these are comprehensive views and that their work will be to focus first on the key areas that can have the most direct impact on student achievement: communication and what families can do at home to support their children's learning.

THINGS WE WANT TO REMEMBER ABOUT STEP 1 PLANNING TO PLAN...



Step 2 **NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

EXAMINE CURRENT PRACTICES to involve parents and families in their child's education.

Rationale

Data needs should be collected on the district's/building's current family involvement practices to determine if they are sufficient in quality and quantity to increase student learning. It is especially important to collect data on practices that research has shown to have the most direct impact on student achievement, i.e., frequent communication with parents and what parents do to support their children's education at home.

Data collection helps maintain quality, but do not get so caught up in data collection that nothing ever happens to improve parent involvement. While data collection is important to ensure that you are having the desired impact, it is also important to get started! Begin with small obvious things that can be done until the major efforts can be planned. Michael Fullan has encouraged us for years to "get ready, fire, aim." By that he means to plan, but not at the expense of never getting started. In a reasonably short period of time, some things will emerge that make sense to move forward on without waiting for the entire plan to emerge. Go ahead and get started, then based on what you learn from those experiences, narrow your efforts to the strategies that encourage the type of parent involvement you are working toward.

In addition to the fact that they have the most direct impact on student learning, another advantage to focusing on the REACH key messages of respectful communication and helping at home is that it makes the task more manageable. Developing relationships with parents to help them feel comfortable as active partners in their child's education at home and at school begins with on-going two-way communication. And while parents are already doing many things to support their children's learning, finding out what they understand about the specific ways that they can enhance what their child is learning at school can be a win-win opportunity for everyone.

Getting Started

At the end of Step 1, Family Engagement Action Team (FEAT) reviewed what a comprehensive system of family engagement practices might look like. The next task will help you determine how your school measures up, particularly in the areas of communication and helping at home. A good investigation begins with questions and hunches. The first step in learning about family engagement in your school is to identify the questions and hunches you want to investigate.

Two major questions start every team's investigation.

1. What family engagement activities are currently in place at our school?

- a. Do we support a variety of ways families can be engaged at our school?
- b. What ways of engaging families are lacking in our school that research indicates will increase student achievement?

Every school should strive for a variety of ways to involve families. Different families choose different ways to be involved in their child's learning experiences because of their strengths, challenges, and preferences. If family engagement is a strategy for higher achievement for **all** your students, you will need ways to form partnerships with **all** parents. All parents, however, do not need to be doing the same thing with their children at the same time. You need to individualize for families just as you do for students.

2. What is the quality of our family engagement practices?

Having a variety of family engagement experiences is part of the picture. However, you must also have quality in those experiences *from the family's point of view* to form an effective partnership. Quality in family engagement means that the practice makes families feel:

Welcomed: comfortable and a part of the school family

Honored: respected, recognized for their strengths, and affirmed for their efforts to be involved in their child's learning

Connected: children at the center of our joint efforts and parents as partners in their child's learning

Focused on student learning: family engagement activities your school supports include an element that focuses attention on your student achievement goals

- If public music performances are a family (and community) engagement activity in your school, demonstrate a reading strategy at intermission.
- If parent-teacher conferences are well attended and valued, talk there with each parent about the math benchmarks and indicators.
- If parents read school newsletters regularly, be sure to include ideas for everyday activities they can do with their child that support your achievement goals (especially reading and math).
- If parents want workshops on parenting and behavior management, include activities that support learning goals (reading and math), career preparation, or high expectations.

A quick way to improve the quality of family engagement at your school is to turn every family activity into an opportunity to teach parents how to support their child in meeting school expectations and goals.

A quick way to improve the quality of family engagement at your school is to turn every family activity into an opportunity to teach parents how to support their child in meeting school expectations and goals.

Your team may have additional questions about family engagement at your school you want to investigate. As much as possible, keep the questions focused on communication and helping at home which have the most direct impact on student achievement. Take the time to write these additional questions down.

Data Gathering Options

There are a number of ways to gather information on parent engagement. The method you choose will depend on the question you are asking and the number of responses you can reasonably expect. You may wish to consult with an expert at your Area Education Agency to assure that the tools and methods you use are appropriate for your questions.

- Surveys can gather quite a lot of information IF people return them. They generally require that people read, which eliminates responses from some parents. All ideas are generated by the developer(s) of the survey.
- Group Interviews give people a chance to talk in a small group about open-ended questions. These groups are generally homogeneous so that participants are comfortable speaking frankly. Group interviews take more time, but they may provide information you would otherwise fail to collect. This is particularly true if you use an outside facilitator.
- Individual Interviews are a good way to gain an understanding of people who don't participate in usual school activities or respond to surveys. Like group interviews, they may be time-consuming. However, individual interviews, especially done in the family home, may be the only way to form partnerships with some parents.
- Review of materials and artifacts helps us learn differences between what you say and what you do. A school tour may provide very useful information on ways you fall short in welcoming, honoring, and connecting with families and community members.

Who to Involve

For questions about the number and quality of family engagement practices in our schools, you will want input from teaching staff, parents and families, support staff, and community members. You will have to make extra effort to get information from families not directly involved in school activities. Your Key Influencers will be critical in this data-gathering role because of the comfort level and prestige they can bring to the process.

Collecting Data on Current Practices



Tool 2.1 SAMPLE INVENTORY OF SCHOOL AND FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

To answer the first question above, “What family engagement activities are currently in place at our school?” your team may want to use a modified version of a survey created by K. Salinas, J. Epstein, and M. Sanders at Johns Hopkins University. This survey, *An Inventory of Present Practices of School, Family, and Community Partnerships*, is based on the research of Joyce Epstein. Epstein’s framework identifies six types of parent involvement as well as sample practices or activities. The specific activities mentioned in the survey can help your team understand each type of involvement more fully. Using this framework will help you notice types of family engagement that you might otherwise overlook.

Iowa Statewide PIRC has modified the inventory to focus on the two key areas we are currently addressing in Iowa: on-going two-way communication and helping at home. A copy of the modified inventory is included in your toolkit. To see the complete version of the inventory, download a document called “Strengthening Parent Involvement: A Toolkit” from the Colorado Department of Education at www.cde.state.co.us/cdeunified/download/pi_toolkit.pdf. The survey begins on page 76.

If your action team has broad representation of school employees and community members, you may feel you can complete this survey as a team activity. However, each group represented on your action team has a slightly different set of experiences with the school. You may feel that you need more information from some groups. If, for example, you feel you need more information from Bosnian parents or school food service workers, a representative from the action team, preferably also a key influencer for the groups to be interviewed, could meet with them in a setting in which they are comfortable. The action team representative could complete the survey with parents or staff based on information collected in the group discussion.

Collecting Data on Quality of Practices

The *Sample Inventory of School and Family Partnerships* helps you understand the number and types of family engagement practices at your school. The next step is to gather information about the quality of your practices. That is, do the opportunities for families at your school result in them feeling welcomed, honored, and connected? Are these activities explicitly linked to students learning the standards and benchmarks at their grade level? A focus group can help you learn more about the quality of the work being done.



Tool 2.2 “TAKING MEASURE: FRANK DISCUSSION IN FOCUS GROUPS...”

Successful group interviews must be carefully designed. For tips on how to conduct group interviews, or focus groups, that yield useful data, consult an article by Robbie Champion entitled “Taking Measure: Frank discussion in focus groups can yield useful data” in the *Journal of Staff Development* (Fall 2003). Paste the address <http://www.nsd.org/library/publications/jsd/champion244.cfm> into your browser to access the article.

Open-ended questions for your group interview must be carefully designed. Your questions should reflect criteria of quality family engagement: welcoming, honoring, connecting, and with a focus on student learning. In addition, your action team may have a need for specific information as a result of analyzing the results of your local Inventory of School and Family Partnerships. The following is a sample set of questions you might use in your group interview:

Opening Question: Tell us your name and describe your connection to the school.

Introductory Question: What does “success at school” mean to you?

Key Question 1: How much do you feel part of the school family? (Ask for examples.)

Key Question 2: In what ways are you involved in your child’s learning at home?

Key Question 3: What do you wish the staff at school knew about you?

Key Question 4: How could the school assist you in helping your child learn?

Key Question 5: What information about your child’s progress at school would be helpful to you?

Ending Question: We want the school to be partners with every parent. What advice do you have for us?

The framework for these questions is based on Richard Krueger’s *Developing Questions for Focus Groups* (SAGE: 1998).

Depending on the time and resources you have available, it may also be important to conduct some one-on-one conversations with parents who feel uncomfortable participating in or attending focus group activities. This would be especially important in situations where no individuals from a key group are represented or when an issue is so important that ideas from many people are critical to moving forward in a productive manner.

The inventory and focus groups described in Tools 2.1 and 2.2 will give you information about the extent and quality of parent engagement in your school. Additional information about quality, specifically about the degree to which your school is welcoming, can be gained by doing a “walk-through.”



TOOL 2.3 “SEEING YOUR SCHOOL AS OTHERS SEE IT”

A walk-through uses observations and artifacts to answer this question: To what extent do the following make **each** family feel welcome: 1) our physical environment; 2) our policies and practices; 3) the personal interactions of school people in the community; 4) our written materials and communications.

A useful Walk-Through Packet was developed by Jefferson County Public Schools in Colorado. The entire packet can be downloaded at this address: http://jeffcoweb.jeffco.k12.co.us/home/info/welcoming_environment.pdf.

Your action team can review the packet and determine which parts would provide useful information in answering your questions about family involvement.

Data Collection Display Options

Putting all this information together from different people in your school family will allow your team to make informed decisions about what needs to be changed for improvement in family engagement at your school. QIC-Decide training stressed the importance displaying your data at the “collect” stage so that informed decisions can be made. While you will want to display the data from the inventory, focus groups, and walk-throughs as separate documents, it is also helpful to pull that information together into one display if possible for a more complete synthesis.



TOOL 2.4 PERFORMANCE MEASURES DISPLAY

This tool, which has been adapted from the Results Accountability work of Mark Friedman, might be a way to synthesize your data into a single document to facilitate the decision-making process. For more information on Friedman’s work and the framework for this tool, go to www.resultsaccountability.com and click on “RBA 101 PowerPoint Presentation with Narrative.”

The advantage of this format is that it organizes data on effort and impact (which is similar to the implementation and impact data being collected for the Iowa Professional Development Model), as well as looking at the quantity *and* quality of each.

At this stage of the planning process, your displays should include statements of what the data says. They should not be decision or analysis statements. That will come later in steps 3 and 4 once you have narrowed your focus and looked at possible strategies to implement.

Next Steps and Other Options

Step 2 has been intended to help you identify the current state of family engagement in your district/building. The next step looks at what Iowa and the federal government expectations are for family engagement, as well as promising practices from the research. Based on what you learn in Expectations and Research-based Practices, you can identify your vision for the future, gaps in your practice, and possibly even additional data you may want to collect based on what you have learned from the research.

A REMINDER ABOUT USING THE TOOLS

Keep in mind that the tools do not have to be used in the order they are included here.

Feel free to move tools from Step 3 forward if you wish to give participants more information to generate different needs assessment questions from the beginning.

Some other resources you may want to review in developing your needs assessment tool can be found on the National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools website at www.sedl.org/connections, “Working with Parents” in the SAI *Survival Guide for Iowa School Administrators* found at www.sai-iowa.org, and the Iowa Support Team analysis questions on stakeholders (See Tool 2.5 below). As you review the tools on these sites, keep in mind the importance of focusing initially on gathering data related to the on-going two-way communication and helping children at home so that the data you collect is not so overwhelming.



TOOL 2.5 SINA QUESTIONS ON “BUILDING/DISTRICT SYSTEMS: STAKEHOLDERS—FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES”

The Iowa Support Team for Schools in Need of Assistance (SINA) under No Child Left Behind assists schools in looking at a series of questions about the key areas that have been shown to have an impact on student learning. This tool contains the questions related to family involvement.

THINGS WE WANT TO REMEMBER ABOUT STEP 2 NEEDS ASSESSMENT...



Step 3 EXPECTATIONS and RESEARCH-BASED PRACTICES

EDUCATE your Family Engagement Action Team (FEAT) members on the requirements and research base on parent involvement to develop a school vision statement.

Rationale

Identifying and studying research-based practices to engage families at home and in the school setting are just as important as reviewing research to determine critical instructional strategies for the classroom. No one has the time to continue relying on the strategies we have been using that have failed to help *all* parents learn about and feel comfortable engaging in the kinds of activities that can have a significant impact on their children's learning.

To be effective, the Family Engagement Action Team (FEAT) must be knowledgeable about federal requirements for parental involvement and research strategies that have been shown to impact student achievement. This step provides that kind of information so that the team can identify a school community vision for family engagement to support student learning and determine focus areas for the planning process.

Learning Process

The Appendix provides a variety of resources to begin the education process for the Family Engagement Action Team (FEAT). As with any adult learner, it is important to provide team members with opportunities to read, reflect, and interact with others in focused dialogue to reach consensus on what the resources mean for the local school community. The facilitator of the team should be knowledgeable about the research-based practices and, if needed, work with a coach to help design well-planned meetings that result in decisions for action. Valuable coaches who can help include Parent-Educator Connection consultants and the Iowa Support Team members at Area Education Agencies.

The tools included in Step 3 focus only on those that will provide the team with a basic understanding of the state and federal requirements for parent involvement in the school setting and what current research says about family engagement activities that impact student learning. The end product of this step is to develop a vision of family engagement that fits the local community. However, depending on the needs of the team, the facilitator may want to also consider some of the tools included in Step 4 during this time. Step 4 tools focus more on actual programs that might be considered

when the team has its vision in place and is ready to make decisions for the Family Engagement Action Plan.

Federal Requirements for Parent Involvement

The Federal Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Act of 2002, commonly called No Child Left Behind, requires that schools actively involve parents in the education of their children.



TOOL 3.1 PARENT INVOLVEMENT REQUIREMENTS— TITLE I AND NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

This tool outlines the Title I definition of Parent Involvement and the requirements of No Child Left Behind. It also highlights the key research points that the United States Department of Education uses to support the need for increased parent involvement in America's schools.

Also included is the sample letter from the IA Department of Education which Schools in Need of Assistance are required to send to parents notifying them of their rights.

Research-base for Parent Engagement

A New Wave of Evidence (2003) and *Diversity* (2004) from the Southeast Regional Laboratory (www.sedl.org/pubs/library_community.html) are two recent syntheses of the research on the impact of parent involvement on student achievement.

An excellent user-friendly resource is *Parents and Learning* (Tool 1.3.2 above) by Sam Redding and available in English, Spanish, Korean, and Chinese versions. It is part of an Educational Practices series available from the International Bureau of Education at www.ibe.unesco.org/international/Publications/EducationalPractices/pracome.htm.

Because it is so important for people to interact with new information to bring local meaning to it, leaders should provide opportunities for Family Engagement Action Team (FEAT) members to discuss the research base.



TOOL 3.2 PROMOTING SUCCESS THROUGH PARENT INVOLVEMENT

The Iowa Statewide Parent Information Resource Center (PIRC) used *The New Wave of Evidence*, *Diversity*, and *Parents and Learning* to develop a PowerPoint presentation with supporting materials and activities.

It is a four-hour activity in its present form. Iowa Statewide PIRC team members are in the process of grouping it into several 90-minute activities which can be used in Family Engagement Action Team (FEAT) meetings. When this version is available it will be posted on www.iowaparents.org.

Iowa Statewide PIRC staff has also put together a beginning list of resources they have found helpful in their work. Leaders may want to peruse some of the web sites listed for additional research-based resources that are uniquely suited to their school community.

**TOOL 3.3****SOME OF IOWA STATEWIDE PIRC'S FAVORITE RESOURCES****Community Profile of the School District**

The research on parent involvement has no meaning unless considered in relation to the needs of the local community. It is important that Family Engagement Action Team (FEAT) members review actual data on their school community rather than rely on their impressions.

Iowa State University Extension has developed a *Community Profile of the School District* for every school district in Iowa. The Profile draws from the 2000 census data and other available data about Iowa counties to describe the following characteristics of the school district:

- Population Profile, including age, educational attainment, race and Hispanic origin, religious affiliation
- Employment Profile
- Household and Family Profile, including household type and linguistic isolation
- Living Arrangement of Children Profile, including family type and employment status of parents
- Student Body Profile, including enrollment and projected enrollment, nursery school enrollment, high school graduation rate, student academic proficiencies, and free and reduced-priced school meals

**TOOL 1.1 COMMUNITY PROFILE OF THE SCHOOL DISTRICT**

To find a print-ready version for your school district and related resources for analyzing these data, go to www.iowaparents.com.

It is important that Family Engagement Action Team (FEAT) members look at the data to find opportunities, not to find “excuses” to continue the status quo. Every child in Iowa deserves to be supported by a community that leaves no stone unturned in continuing the Iowa tradition of quality education for all. For that reason, questions are also included to help analyze the data to discover possible solution points.

Culture Awareness Information

A resource to help Family Engagement Action Team (FEAT) members learn more about cultural issues that can impact families in their community is available from the University of Northern Iowa's *New Iowans* program. The booklet provides a history of immigration in Iowa and describes the culture of the recent groups who have come to Iowa.



TOOL 3.4 NEW IOWANS: A Companion Book to the PBS Miniseries, *The New Americans*

This booklet was developed in collaboration with Iowa Public Television as a companion piece to work being done by Public Television's *New Americans* series. It provides information about recent immigrant and refugee groups who have come to Iowa. Included is a list of questions and topics for study groups, several agencies in Iowa that can provide additional cultural information, and a glossary. It is an excellent resource when beginning to study how culture can affect families' expectations of their children, education, and family involvement.

Download from www.bcs.uni.edu/idm/newiowans.

More in-depth information on culture is also included in Steps 4 and 5.

Developing a Local Vision for Family Engagement

After the Family Engagement Action Team (FEAT) members have reviewed the federal requirements for parent involvement, considered local implications related to the research base supporting family engagement in student learning, and reviewed local community demographics and possible cultural implications that may emerge from that data, it is important that they craft a statement that describes their vision for family involvement in their school community.

The leader may want to work closely with a coach to design this process or even consider bringing in an outside facilitator so that he/she can also be actively involved in defining the vision. Area Education Agencies have staff who can help facilitate vision statements with groups, but a better alternative may be to consider community members who are actively engaged in facilitating group consensus or visioning in their work environment. Bringing other community members into the process at this point can help to spread the word throughout the community that family engagement is an important responsibility for all citizens. A third resource to consider for the visioning process would be your local county Extension staff.

Additional Needs Assessment

At this point, Family Engagement Action Team (FEAT) members need to look again at the Performance Measures Display (Tool 2.4) in relation to the vision the team has established to determine if additional data is needed.

It will be helpful to look again at the REACH Data Questions that were outlined in the Preface (Appendix, p. ii). These questions focused on the implementation of strategies by the school that positively impacted on-going, two-way communication with parents and that assisted parents in their efforts to help their children at home with their learning. The questions also look at whether those implementation efforts are having an impact that parents consider helpful.

If additional data is needed at this point to begin the planning process, strategies such as the inventory, focus groups, and one-on-one conversations described in Step 2 can be used again to collect the data needed to further inform the planning process.

At the end of the data collection process, the data should again be put into the form of data statements, which can be used over time to determine the impact of the work being done to assist parents in providing the kind of support that enhances their child's learning.

Analyze Your Data

To this point, the team has only written data statements describing the current status of family engagement in the district. Family Engagement Action Team (FEAT) members need to take the next step of analyzing the data in relation to their vision to determine where they want to focus their work.

Analyzing data becomes richer when tools are also available to help team members reflect on the current status in relation to ideal research-based implementation. Iowa Statewide PIRC has been unable to locate an existing configuration map which integrates the research-base on parent involvement and its impact on student achievement. Efforts are underway by Iowa Statewide PIRC and national experts in parent involvement to see if such a tool could be developed.

In the meantime, it is helpful to review the work you are doing in relation to sources such as the key findings in *A New Wave of Evidence* (www.sedl.org/connections) which are also listed in the Preface, as well as the Title I requirements that are listed in Tool 3.1.



TOOL 3.5 FAMILY ENGAGEMENT SELF-ASSESSMENT MAP

(NOTE: Tool 3.5 not available at this time but will be on-line at www.iowaparents.org as soon as completed.)

A configuration map can help you self-assess where your district is in relation to full implementation of a comprehensive family engagement system. PIRC's goal is to also have a checklist to help you determine if you are meeting federal requirements for family engagement.

The Family Involvement Action Team needs to identify one or two priorities or focus areas to be addressed in your planning process which begins in Step 4. Hopefully, your data collection has already looked primarily at the current state of on-going, two-way communication with families and what families can do at home to support their children's learning. These are two research-based findings that are the most likely to impact student achievement. At this point, Family Engagement Action Team (FEAT) members should identify what about the focus areas needs to be targeted so that during the planning stage, team members can look for promising practices addressing those specific needs. Coaching by AEA parent-educator connection staff, school improvement

staff, or Iowa Support Team staff can be particularly helpful to Family Engagement Action Team (FEAT) leadership during this stage of the process.

Simultaneity and the Iowa Professional Development Model

It is important to also educate the members of the Family Engagement Action Team (FEAT) on the importance of the District Career Development Plan (DCDP). This plan has been designed to operationalize the Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP) of the district in order to meet the building's/district's Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs) for No Child Left Behind. The District Career Development Plan is designed to maintain a training focus in the district on proximal strategies that directly impact student learning in the classroom.

While parent involvement strategies do impact student learning, they are distal strategies which have a more indirect impact. For this reason, it would not be appropriate for district staff to spend a significant amount of time studying, planning and implementing parent involvement strategies. No more than 20% of the professional development time should be spent on distal strategies.

Instead, Family Engagement Action Team (FEAT) members and the Building Leadership Teams in the district should consider the concept of *simultaneity* as described in the Iowa Professional Development Model. Family Engagement Action Team (FEAT) members may want to recommend that as teachers are learning new instructional strategies in the classroom, they should take a small amount of time in the training or in collaborative teams to discuss how parents might become engaged in reinforcing at home the strategy or concept being learned. Family Engagement Action Team (FEAT) members also need to consider ways to engage family educators (e.g. clergy, social workers, Extension staff) in the community in helping parents continually improve the impact they have on their children's learning so that the total responsibility for supporting parents does not fall entirely on the school staff. This is an important time to remember the proverb "It takes a village to raise a child."

THINGS WE WANT TO REMEMBER ABOUT STEP 3 EXPECTATIONS AND RESEARCH-BASED PRACTICES...



Step 4 **PLANNING**

SELECT STRATEGIES that match your district's needs and develop a 2-3 year action plan.

Rationale

While there are several options available to help design parent involvement programs that work, the ones the Family Engagement Action Team (FEAT) members choose must align with the data that was collected in Step 2 (Needs Assessment). Without that alignment, there can be little significant impact on parent involvement to support increased local student learning. Incorporating the implementation of on-going, two-way communication and helping at home strategies into a multiple year plan ensures that:

- Someone is responsible for overseeing the implementation of strategies as planned;
- Resources needed are available;
- Data is collected and evaluated;
- Decisions are made to support families in their efforts to enhance their child's education.

Step 4 focuses on what needs to be included in a plan, as well as examples of promising practices already underway nationally and in Iowa. The Family Engagement Action Team (FEAT) members will be reviewing these options in relation to the focus areas established in Step 3 (Expectations and Research-based Practices) to develop a long-term plan for family engagement.

Planning Formats

Different communities may initially come into the planning process for family engagement from a variety of starting points. A district that has buildings identified as Schools in Need of Assistance may want to use their SINA Action Plan format to identify the results, activities, and resources necessary to increase family involvement. In other districts, the County Empowerment Board or other community agencies may already be playing a significant role in organized family support efforts and may have a planning format in place which could be expanded to focus on support for student learning as well.

The SINA action plan format is included here but if other efforts are already underway in the community to support families, it is important to join those efforts. A key role the Family Engagement Action Team (FEAT) members can play is to educate other family educators in the community about ways they can help their parent clients develop additional strategies to add to their existing repertoire for supporting their child's

learning at home and for communicating effectively with the educators in the school who work with their children.



TOOL 4.1 SCHOOLS IN NEED OF ASSISTANCE ACTION PLANNING FORMAT

Schools and districts that have been identified as needing assistance must include plans for actively involving parents in their child's educational opportunities. While the teacher instructional strategies to meet the individual needs of learners will be the key strategies teachers are focused on achieving, parent involvement strategies should also support these learning outcomes. This is one of many strategies the school should be implementing, the most important of which is continuous improvement of teacher instructional strategies to meet the individual needs of learners.

The parent involvement plan should indicate how the identified family engagement strategies would link to the reading, math, and science instructional strategies being addressed in the district. Remember that parent/family involvement is not the end product. Proficiency for every student by 2013-2014 is the product we are working toward together as schools, families, and communities.

While long-term plans are always important in order to sustain the effort, the most detailed portion of the plan will involve activities covering the first 12 months. If the plan is to be successful, The Family Engagement Action Team (FEAT) members will need to continually assess the impact of the activities to determine if they are being implemented as planned and are having the desired impact. The REACH Data Questions identified in the Preface are one source of questions to continually consider in determining if activities are having the intended impact for long-term effect.

Integrate Plans with Work in Progress

Engaging families in the work of student learning does not necessarily require adding on to an already overloaded list of initiatives. School leaders need to look at other committees and efforts in the district and community, and then reflect on how the goals of the Family Engagement Action Team (FEAT) can be integrated into those efforts. Some examples might include:

- Educating the Professional Development Building Leadership Team on the importance of family engagement in student learning so they can generate opportunities for simultaneity into learning experiences for teachers;
- Encouraging PTA or PTO leaders to focus meetings on the goals of the Family Engagement Action Team (FEAT);
- Communicating key information at times when parents are already coming to the district (e.g., Parent-Teacher Conferences, student schedule planning meetings with counselors, Booster Club meetings, athletic or fine arts events);
- Reviewing data already being collected on the importance of the family in a student's life (e.g., the Iowa Youth Survey);

- Requesting data collected by other youth and family support agencies, such as ISU Extension, County Empowerment services, United Way, local social services, county human services, cultural support agencies, etc.; and
- Including questions about family activities at home to support learning in the needs assessment data collected at least every 5 years as part of the school accreditation process.

This working together with existing committees both within the district and within the community can help to engage the people of influence and the key communicators discussed in Step 1 (Planning to Plan) into your activities in order to create an environment that supports families in their efforts to maximize their children's education.

When developing the plan, acknowledge that everyone has a lot to do—and that things are already being done to encourage family engagement. Include in your plan some simple, easy-to-implement strategies that will make a difference very quickly. One of your goals or objectives might be communicating messages about family involvement strategies that are the mostly likely to contribute to increased student achievement at different grade levels. Multiple groups in the community can help to get this message out to families. Even something as simple as developing a list of things that contribute to a “study-friendly” environment at home and putting them in grocery sacks, on placemats in the local cafes, or on bookmarks in the library can begin making a statement about the direction the group is taking in supporting families.

For communities who have already begun to establish a collaborative approach to community planning, economic development, or other quality-of-life efforts, you may want to consider developing a community-based planning effort on supporting families in the community.

TOOL 4.2 Partnering with Parents

Partnering with Parents is a program that is already available through ISU Extension for family educators. For more information, go to www.extension.iastate.edu/pwp.

You may want to stay in contact with your county Extension staff regarding a related version being piloted in the fall of 2006. Iowa Statewide PIRC is currently working with ISU Extension to develop a variation of their *Partnering with Parents* program. The new option will be focus on bringing together key community leaders (e.g. clergy, county human services staff, family physicians, Extension family specialists, corporate human resource directors, educators) to reach consensus on the key messages needed in the community to support families in helping their children grow physically, emotionally, intellectually, and socially. It is anticipated that the program will be ready for implementation by the fall of 2007.

Learn from and Partner with Other Organizations Who Work with Families

Every community has people in the community who work on an on-going basis with families. Examples include religious leaders, pediatricians or family practice physicians, county human services staff, AEA social workers and Parent-Educator Connection consultants, county Extension family specialists, and many others that are unique to a given community. These are all in addition to the connections educators affiliated with a particular school have with families. The Family Engagement Action Team members need to identify who these resources are and tap into their expertise for strategies that they have found to be of value in reaching parents.

There are also two state resources that can be helpful as well: Iowa COMPASS and Early ACCESS. While they are focused on audiences in need of special support, they are still a valuable resource for identifying many, if not all, of the agencies in your county that work with families.

TOOL 4.3 Iowa COMPASS

According to the website: “Iowa COMPASS is Iowa's free, statewide information and referral service for people with disabilities, their families, service providers, and other members of the community. We maintain information on over 6,000 local, state, and national agencies and programs.” They are available by calling 800-779-2001 or on the web at www.medicine.uiowa/iowacompass. You can search by county or by agency.

A sample of a Program Information Sheet is in the Appendix.

TOOL 4.4 Early ACCESS

According to the web site: “Early ACCESS is a partnership between families with young children, birth to age three, and providers from the Departments of Education, Public Health, Human Services, and the Child Health Specialty Clinics. The purpose of this program is for families and staff to work together in identifying, coordinating and providing needed services and resources that will help the family assist their infant or toddler to grow and develop. The family and providers work together to identify and address specific family concerns and priorities as they relate to the child's overall growth and development. In addition, broader family needs and concerns can be addressed by locating other supportive/resources services in the local community for the family and/or child. All services to the child are provided in the child's natural environment including the home and other community settings where children of the same age without disabilities participate.” To learn more, go to www.state.ia.us/earlyaccess.

A sample of a Community Center Information Sheet is included in the Appendix.

In addition to these state resources, your Area Education Agency has staff that can provide expertise as you plan your work with families. Examples include specialized

staff that works with the families of children with specific disabilities, Parent-Educator Connection staff, English-Language Learner consultants, Learning Supports consultants (formerly Success4), Youth-at-Risk staff, and the Iowa Support Team for Schools in Need of Assistance.



TOOL 4.5 IOWA SUPPORT TEAM FOR SCHOOLS IN NEED OF ASSISTANCE (SINA)

Iowa Support Team members have received technical assistance from the Department of Education on parent involvement expectations and resources. In many cases, the team has further educated other agency members to be able to support all schools in parent involvement efforts.

Questions to Ask When Selecting Family Engagement Strategies

Comprehensive School Improvement Planning has helped schools learn that picking a reading/math strategy that directly impacts the student achievement in their district is more complex than finding one that had training readily available or that worked in another district. The key is to identify strategies that match the needs of the students in the local district.



TOOL 4.6 STANDARDS/QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER WHEN DECIDING ON A STRATEGY OR PROGRAM

This tool lists a set of questions which will help you select strategies which link as closely as possible to the needs of families in the district.

Consider Cultural Impact

Selecting an appropriate strategy for the parent audience also requires awareness of cultural values they may be brought to the process. Several tools are available on the PIRC website to help planners align materials to the diverse cultural needs of parents. Keep in mind that while these tools are very helpful, there is no substitution for developing a trusting relationship with parents and getting to know them as individuals. Otherwise, you run the risk of stereotyping parents and their children. No description can ever take the place of getting to know parents as individuals who have their own unique hopes and values for their children.




TOOL 4.7 CULTURE SUMMARIES: EDUCATION IN...

These summaries were developed based on descriptions written by Iowa residents about their educational experiences in their country of origin. They are one person's perspective from their native country regarding the Hispanic, Southeast Asian, and Bosnian educational systems. They also provide insights into the cultural background—the beliefs, values, roles, and relationships—that may influence parent's views of how to support their children in school.

Also included are descriptions of the refugee culture and what families experience in a culture of poverty.

Go to www.iowaparents.org and select "Getting to Know My Community."




TOOL 4.7.1 SAMPLE QUESTIONS TO ASK FAMILIES TO LEARN ABOUT THEIR CULTURE AND THEIR VIEW ON PARENT INVOLVEMENT

If you decide to conduct a panel or personal interviews with families, a more extensive list of questions is available on the Iowa Statewide PIRC website at www.iowafamilies.org.




TOOL 4.8 EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES

This description from ENLACE (Engaging Latino Communities for Education) of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, is intended to help immigrants understand their role in the American educational setting compared to the parents' role in their native country. It is available in both English and Spanish versions. You may find that it is most helpful for an appropriate person of influence to use in having face-to-face conversations with parents about the differences between the Iowa educational system and the one where they grew up as children themselves.

Samples of Promising Practices on Parent Engagement

Dividing the Family Engagement Action Team (FEAT) members into subgroups to review promising practices related to your goals may be one way to begin the process of identifying which strategies/programs might best fit your needs. Several resources are available to help you with this. In addition to the resources listed in Tool 3.3, which lists some of Iowa Statewide PIRC's favorite resources, other resources you might find helpful include:

- Iowa School Board Association Lighthouse Project
www.ia-sb.org/studentachievement/lighthouse.asp
- Iowa State Education Association's link to research related to parent involvement and student achievement
www.nea.org/parents/index.html

- Colorado Department of Education's *Strengthening Parent Involvement: A Toolkit* which was helpful to Iowa Statewide PIRC in designing its own toolkit www.cde.state.co.us/index_home.htm. (Search for Strengthening Parent Involvement.)
- National Center for Family and Community Connections which produced the four syntheses of research on parent involvement's role in student achievement; focus on the studies in the back of each document. www.sedl.org/connections

TOOL 4.9 REACH LINKS

Iowa Statewide PIRC is working with the Iowa Department of Education Learning Supports project to develop a Family Engagement Content Network which will summarize research-based strategies and programs that have worked in other communities. These summaries are called REACH Links and are available on the Iowa Statewide PIRC website at www.iowaparents.org.

Additional links will continue to be added. If you have suggestions for possible links you would like to see reviewed, go to Contact Us on the web site.

TOOL 4.10 PARENT ENGAGEMENT PROJECTS UNDERWAY IN AEA 267

AEA 267 headed up the team of agencies who applied for the current PIRC grant in Iowa. Alison Bell at AEA 267 is the grant coordinator. In 2005–2006, the AEA 267 PIRC team is working on the following projects:

- *Focus on Parent Involvement* project: This is the 2nd year of professional development work led by content expert Karen Mapp of Harvard University. On-going technical assistance is part of the project work by AEA staff.
- Presentations on parent involvement at mentoring and induction workshops using a facilitator's guide developed by agency staff;
- Embedded activities on parent involvement in the agency's professional development initiative on reading;
- Parent training in Early Literacy;
- Presentations at Title I parent meetings;
- State conference presentations, plus presentations to AEA 267 superintendents and principals.

TOOL 4.11 MATH AND PARENT PARTNERSHIPS (MAPPS)

Teachers and administrators in Storm Lake are preparing to begin workshops during the 2005–2006 school year for parents to learn hands-on activities to support their children as they learn mathematics. For more information on the program and the initial efforts in Storm Lake, contact Karen Willis of the PIRC staff at kwillis@iowatelecom.net.



TOOL 4.12

**IDEAS FOR HELPING YOUR CHILDREN DEVELOP
READING AND MATH SKILLS: IOWA STATEWIDE
PIRC WORKSHOPS FOR FAMILIES**

If you are interested in conducting a series of workshops for families on how they can encourage their children's development in reading and math, information is available on Tool 4.12 in the Appendix. PIRC will train staff, parents, and/or community volunteers to conduct the workshops which can be designed for families with children in grades kindergarten through second grade.

Plan Up Front for a Program Evaluation Component

To know if the strategies identified by the Family Engagement Action Team (FEAT) members have an impact on family engagement, it is important to collect data on the results you have identified as critical. It will be difficult to make direct links to student achievement at this early stage of the learning process, but you can identify the research-based practices you are trying to implement and collect baseline, formative, and summative data to determine if you are making progress toward your goal(s).

More information and tools are available in Step 6 (Program Evaluation), but it is important at this stage of the process to be sure that the Family Engagement Action Team (FEAT) members are clear about their vision for family engagement in student learning and how it links to their version of the REACH Data Questions in the Preface.

THINGS WE WANT TO REMEMBER ABOUT STEP 4 PLANNING...



Step 5 **SUSTAINABILITY**

Identify the resources needed and the support necessary from the community to implement strategies and maintain long-term impact.

Rationale

The Native American proverb “It takes a village to raise a child” holds true through the implementation process. Schools that try to take on this role alone are destined to fail. They do not have the networking, time and/or financial resources available to have the impact needed. Schools must become a part of larger community efforts supporting quality of life initiatives for all families to make a real difference.

This step is designed to help Family Engagement Action Team members consider the importance of whole community commitment to maintain the initiative over time. *The tools included in this step are minimal at this time but as developed will be found on line at www.iowaparents.org.*

Planning for Sustainability

Several things suggested in this toolkit are key to sustaining high quality parent/family engagement efforts in the community:

- Establishing a team of people of influence who learn together about the importance of parent/family engagement in sustaining high student achievement efforts;
- Creating a vision and desired results for what parent engagement looks like;
- Identifying the strategies and/or activities that best match the needs of the community, as well as the activities necessary to reach the desired results;
- Designing a plan with community leaders who can maintain an appropriate focus on implementation without losing sight of the other important initiatives underway in the district.

Funding Sources to Consider

There are sources of funding already in place through No Child Left Behind for parent involvement activities in SINA districts. Also because of increased awareness of the need for family and community engagement in the education process, grants may be available that match your needs. Two web sites to keep you on top of available grants are

www.nal.usda.gov/ric/ricpubs/funding/fundguide.html and www.iagem.gov.

In tight economic times, funding can have a significant impact on whether a project is continued over time. That is why it is so critical that this become your *community's commitment* to maintaining its quality-of-life by supporting families and their children rather than relying on the soft-funding available through grants. Only if the community's people of influence are involved in the planning and see from the data collected the impact the family involvement strategies are having on student achievement will schools be able to rely on support for a project such as this into the future.

Staying on Message

Leadership in the school district and in the community can have a powerful impact over time by simply “staying on message.” In addition to identifying strategies that align with student, family, district and community needs, the Family Engagement Action Team (FEAT) needs to identify 1 or 2 key messages to focus on in the community. These key messages should become the mantra of every leader in the community who has committed to helping families understand the critical role they play in their children's academic success. Whether it is in formal presentations or informal conversations, leaders should find ways to work in these key messages. The *Partnering with Parents* project (Tool 4.2) mentioned in Step 4 is one way to formalize this process in the community.

TOOL 5.1 SAMPLE TALKING POINTS

(NOTE: Tool 5.1 is not available at this time but will be on-line at www.iowaparents.org as soon as completed.)

This tool provides sample talking points that all staff could integrate into their conversations with parents of the children in their classrooms and with friends in their neighborhood, in their place of worship, etc. These are key messages which can be used any place where the opportunity arises to help the community as a whole understand some of the valuable things all adults can do to help the children they are nurturing be successful learners.

Developing a Communication Plan for the District/Building

One component of the overall implementation plan developed in Step 4 should be a Communication Plan with families and the community.

A key to communication is knowing your audience. The Community Profile of the School District (Tool 1.1) can help, but it is also important for all staff to understand and appreciate the knowledge and needs of the families they serve. One way to do that is through a culture panel format that draws on the knowledge of the people of influence within the diverse groups of the community. The best way is to simply encourage each staff member to reach out to the parents of the students they work with and develop a one-on-one relationship with them by visiting them at their home, talking to them by telephone, or participating in social activities with them. No matter what culture we come from, there are unique differences within all of our families. There is no substitute for the trust built through relationships.

In addition to learning more about parents whose culture may be new to the community, it is important to stay on top of changes in the needs of audiences we may have felt we knew in the past. *Chapter 12 Community Reporting:*

Summary of Survey and Focus Group Research Study was conducted in 2000 when reporting to the community took on a more formal level of compliance for Iowa districts.



TOOL 5.2 Chapter 12 Community Reporting: Summary of Survey and Focus Group Research Study (Boddy Media Group, 2000)

Reflect on this data as one source in determining your strategies for communicating your messages to families. You should also consider collecting similar data in your own community on what they want to know about and how.

One of the messages in *Chapter 12 Community Reporting: Summary of Survey and Focus Group Research Study* is that schools only communicate with families when they want something for the school—like a bond issue passed. Frequently in this situation, what schools generally communicate is what is *wrong* with the school in order to motivate people to vote for additional funding.

Since the time of the Boddy Media Group study, Annual Progress Reports (APRs) have become the norm and many schools have become very skilled at communicating the educational improvements that are making a difference, as well as the areas of need and what they are doing about it.

A Communication Plan for Family Engagement goes beyond this kind of yearly one-way reporting. Elementary teachers have long been excellent communicators with parents about activities taking place in the classroom. Middle school and high school teachers have begun to move in this direction as well through web pages on assignments and testing schedules. Districts need to identify various ways staff communicates with parents on a consistent basis and consider how to include in these messages what parents can do at home to support their children's learning.

The plan also needs to include opportunities for parents to communicate with teachers and the school. How are teachers getting valuable information from parents about their knowledge of their child? How is the building learning about the skills parents feel they need to be more supportive of their child's learning? What kind of on-going opportunity is there for parents to express their goals for learning? How is the school helping parents get to know each other so they can share home conditions that support learning (curriculum of the home) or problem-solve issues their children have in common?



TOOL 5.3 SAMPLE COMMUNICATION PLAN

(NOTE: Tool 5.3 is not available at this time but will be on-line at www.iowaparents.org as soon as completed.)

Collaborate to Provide What it Takes

It is also critical to remember that parents and family members do not have to come to the school to be engaged in their children's learning. For some families working multiple jobs, just getting their children to school on time and ready to learn should be recognized as significant involvement and they should be recognized for their efforts.

Many families who want to be active participants in school opportunities to support their child's learning need support with things such as childcare, transportation, and interpreters. Some low cost ways to address this would be to work with high school service groups or retired citizens to care for young children in a productive and fun way so parents can also enjoy their opportunities to work with educators to learn about how to help their children at home. Tap into Volunteer Services agencies to provide transportation, or better yet develop a buddy system where one partner picks up someone who needs transportation. You can also work with key leaders in the cultural community to identify interpreters.

For some families the social opportunities of a meal provide a powerful incentive to participate. Work with businesses and the health care segment of the community to provide nutritional meals. Use this time to help parents to get to know one another so that can begin to develop stronger shared norms for child rearing and their role in the child's learning.

Start Small

Start small with implementing strategies that are easy to do and will provide immediate success. Do not consider starting small to mean doing more of what you have always done. Schools must stretch outside of their comfort zone to implement results-based strategies, but focus in on the strategy that can have the kind of immediate impact that will encourage everyone to get even more deeply involved.

Remember that families are very busy just as educators are. We will all be changing our behavior which is not an easy thing to do. By starting with something that shows important results for the students, it will be easier to maintain those changed behaviors.

A quick way to improve the quality of family engagement at your school is to turn every family activity into an opportunity to teach parents how to support their child in meeting school expectations and goals.

Develop Staff Leadership

We have already established that teachers are expected to spend at least 80% of their professional development time learning about and practicing the instructional strategies established by the district as critical to increasing student achievement. And yet, teachers and other staff need a basic understanding of the key findings about parent involvement to increase student achievement. The Family Engagement Action Team (FEAT) members should be creative in their approach to this so that they do not take critical time from teachers learning and practicing instructional strategies.

One way might be to develop the parent/family engagement leadership within the building through staff whose roles do not require in-depth knowledge of the required instructional strategies. Guidance counselors and nurses are two obvious examples. Although they are as responsible as any other staff member for assisting in increasing student achievement, they do it in different ways and are not expected to practice new instructional strategies at the same level of intensity. Their role could be to develop expertise in parent involvement research and to provide mini-lessons for teachers on promising practices followed by activities to help teachers create help-at-home materials aligned with what is being implemented in the classroom.

While teachers still have to maintain a high communication level with parents of the children in their classrooms, staff such as guidance counselors and nurses can take on a greater share of the responsibility for providing opportunities for parents to learn more about continually improving their role in impacting their child's learning.

Since many teachers are parents themselves, schools can also encourage teachers to attend parent workshops and wear their parent hats so they can gain additional perspective on where other parents want to be helpful but are unclear as to how to do so.

Develop Parent Leadership

Ultimately, the goal is to have parents themselves take the leadership role in engaging other parents to find the best ways for them to work collaboratively with the schools to help their child be a learner at school and at home. Parent groups working together to problem-solve common difficulties can be much more powerful than groups facilitated by an outsider who may offer ideas. There are even programs available to train parents to become more confident presenters about parent involvement programs.



TOOL 5.4 BUILDING SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIPS

Building Successful Partnerships training has been provided in Iowa as recently as the summer of 2005 to help parents develop the skills to present workshops on the National PTA's *National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs* which provided the basis for the definition of "parent involvement" in No Child Left Behind. For more information, contact Iowa PTA at ia_office@pta.org or www.iowapta.org.

Implementation of increased parent/family engagement efforts may seem overwhelming in view of all of the other expectations for teachers, but if the school with the Family Engagement Action Team (FEAT) members looks to the community as a whole, works with sub-groups of staff, as well as parent leaders, the task can become less daunting.

THINGS WE WANT TO REMEMBER ABOUT STEP 5 SUSTAINABILITY...



Step 6 PROGRAM EVALUATION

Evaluate the implementation and the impact of the plan.

Rationale

Throughout *REACH Out to Parents for Student Success: A Toolkit for Educators*, you have been encouraged to positively impact parent involvement by collecting data to:

- Determine needs
- Make informed plans
- Continually improve the implementation of the planned strategies
- Determine the potential impact of parent involvement on student achievement. At the end of the first year of the learning and development process, it will be difficult to determine any direct results related to student achievement because of the number of factors involved. Title I regulations, however, require an evaluation of the effectiveness of your district parent involvement policy/plans. There are many kinds of data that can help you move closer to being able to determine in the future the impact of parent involvement on student achievement.

Step 6 will begin to help you determine data collection considerations that can generate a self-accountability processes that will result in continuous improvement. *The tools included in this step are minimal at this time but as developed will be found on line at www.iowaparents.org.*

Implementation and Impact Data

In the Preface you first looked at the REACH Data Questions.

REACH DATA QUESTIONS

RESPECT FOR PARENT'S ROLES AND DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS

IMPACT: What percent of parents feel their knowledge about their child is of value to the staff in the school?

IMPLEMENTATION: What are the things we are doing as individuals and as a staff to learn from parents about their children's needs and cultural experiences?

ENGAGEMENT THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

IMPACT: How do parents describe their opportunities to be engaged in meaningful ways (not just involvement) in creating a learning environment in the school? What percent of parents feel they are engaged in meaningful ways?

IMPLEMENTATION: What are we doing to ensure that our staff values and actively engages in partnerships with parents?

ALL FAMILIES WANT THEIR CHILDREN TO BE SUCCESSFUL, SO ASK WHAT SUPPORT THEY NEED

IMPACT: What percent of parents feel that the opportunities the school is providing for them to help their child be successful in school is meeting their needs?

IMPLEMENTATION: What data have we formally collected from parents to identify their needs in supporting their children as learners?

CURRICULUM OF THE HOME FOR A LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

IMPACT: What are parents already doing to create a learning environment in the home? What percent of parents are aware of the importance of the curriculum of the home?

IMPLEMENTATION: What resources do we have available to help parents reflect on or learn about things they could do to create a learning environment in the home?

HELP AT HOME WITH SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

IMPACT: What are parents already doing at home to help their children develop academic knowledge and skills? What percent of parents are aware of the importance of helping at home?

IMPLEMENTATION: What opportunities do we provide parents to learn more about the curriculum in their child's classroom and possible ways they can support their child's learning at home? What are teachers and counselors doing to help parents understand their changing role as parents when their children move into middle school and high school?

You were encouraged to modify them based on the vision you established for your school community in Step 2, and throughout the process you have been encouraged to collect data on the questions to make just-in-time adjustments to the work being done. By the time you get to Step 6 Program Evaluation, you should have multiple data sets to review to determine progress on your Parent Involvement efforts.

The *implementation data* focuses on the things done by the staff to encourage family engagement in their child's learning process. Reassessing the factors measured in the baseline data collected in Step 2 (Needs Assessment) will help you in analyzing what changes have occurred. This type of data collection is most likely similar to what you may have done in the past, but your new awareness of the value of parent involvement should help you to look at that data with a more critical eye toward next steps. Use what you learned about QIC-Decide during the Iowa Evaluator Approval Training Program to move the Family Engagement Action Team to a decision about change and next steps.

Just collecting data on what has been done by the school is not enough. It is also important to collect *impact data* which includes indicators of increased quantity and/or quality of family engagement over time. Examples might be a longitudinal review of the Iowa Youth Survey data for your district, needs assessment data from parents and their children, changes in the types and frequency of Curriculum of the Home or Help at Home activities families engage in, perception data from parents regarding their value as an active member of the school community, quantitative data on engagement by parents you have not been successful in engaging in the past and/or parents from the NCLB subgroups, etc.

You need implementation data to know if the changes are actually being made by the school staff to further encourage parents and families to feel comfortable and

appreciated for their involvement. You need impact data, to determine if you have made enough difference to have the potential to impact student achievement.

Data Needs to Show More than Parents Coming To the School

It is important to be creative about the kinds of data you can collect from parents about what they are doing to help their children as learners at home. If data is only collected on what they do at the school site, you may indirectly send the message to parents, as well as to your staff, that *only* by coming to the school site can parents be engaged in a meaningful way.

What is critical at this point is to determine if anyone is better off because of the work you have been doing to actively engage families as partners and in helping with the learning process at home.

At this point, you might want to use a data synthesis form that gets more specific to help you identify possible next steps.



TOOL 7.1 PARENT INVOLVEMENT: LOOKING AT THE DATA

NOTE: This tool is still in draft form but is included to suggest ways to gather data.

This data synthesis tool will also help you analyze your data when the self-assessment map Tool # 3.5 is completed. The Standards and Indicators listed come directly from Federal language.

Finally, you need to compare your current state once again to a Self-Assessment Tool, such as Tool 3.5, which helps you identify where you are in developing a Comprehensive Family Engagement System and gives you ideas for next steps in a continuous improvement process. For now, look at resources like the Key Findings in *A New Wave of Evidence* and Title I requirements.

All Parents Want Their Children to be Successful

There are many factors that can impact a parent's actions in supporting his/her children as learners, but it is infrequently because they do not care. Like all of us—yes, even educators whose life is spent teaching others—learning something new can be hard. Often we simply do not know what we do not know.

It is easy to forget that as educators we have had not only formal training but also a great deal of experience to help us learn how to help our own children to be successful. All parents want that kind of knowledge to help their own children. Our job is to partner with parents and the community so that we can all learn how to do a better job of collaborating to ensure that every child in an Iowa classroom is a successful and proficient learner now and throughout his/her lifetime.

THINGS WE WANT TO REMEMBER ABOUT STEP 6 PROGRAM EVALUATION...

