Family-School Partnerships: An Implementation Guide

Colorado Springs School District 11

Adapted from the PTA National Standards for Family-School Partnerships
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Families’ involvement in their children’s learning directly and positively affects educational outcomes. To meet the mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, schools became required to address family involvement in substantial ways. However, it is widely recognized that given the constraints of limited time, funding, staffing and resources, involving parents in their children’s education in ways that are effective and meaningful remains a challenge to schools and districts across the country. There is no topic in education on which there is greater agreement than the need for family and community involvement.

- Teachers and administrators want to know how to work with parents in positive ways and how to involve the community to increase student success.
- Parents want to know if schools are providing high-quality education, how to help their children do their best, and how to connect and communicate with teachers and administrators.
- Students want to succeed in school. They know they need guidance, support, and encouragement from their parents, teachers, other family members, and others in the community.

This country has focused on raising the bar for students and teachers. The federal government insists that high standards be set for all students, with regular assessments to see if students are measuring up. This guide is based off of the 1997 PTA National Standards for Family-School Partnerships, yet adapted to reflect an educator’s standpoint.

There is no alternative to high expectations. If we want students to achieve at even higher levels, we must engage more with their parents and families. The following standards are based on national research and interviews conducted with education experts, and were updated in 2007. These three standards identify what schools, parents, and communities can do together to support student success.

This guide was adapted from the PTA National Standards for family-School Partnerships to assist schools in District 11 in creating and supporting high quality family involvement programs. It is a guide meant to empower educators, families, community members, and students to work together for the educational success of all students in our district.
Research consistently demonstrates the benefits of family-school-community partnerships:

- Higher teacher morale
- Increased communication among parents, teachers, and school leaders
- More parent involvement in supporting teaching and learning
- More community support for the school
- Greater student success

But effectively engaging families and communities in schools to support student learning takes a true commitment to shared leadership and collaboration. Here you’ll find a comprehensive and practical guide to achieving high standards for involvement.

For each standard, the guide provides the following information:

- A definition of the standard, followed by a brief explanation of its importance and a discussion of the key goals
- Expert insights which demonstrate the standard’s value
- A success story from a school community making real progress toward meeting the standard
- Action steps for your school community
- Additional resources to enhance your understanding and help your school meet the standard

The guide also contains:

- An assessment guide (rubric) for each standard with specific goals, indicators and examples of what good practice looks like;
- The PTA Power of Partnerships Family Survey; and
- A family-school partnership action plan template and sample.

**HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE**

This guide will help school communities in District 11 implement programs and practices that encourage partnerships between families, schools, and communities and promote student success. Use the guide to educate your community about the importance of family involvement, and to direct the development of effective relationships.

To put these materials to best use, it is suggested to form a school action team focused on promoting family and community involvement. Include parents, other caregivers and family members, school staff, community members, and even students. Have the whole team familiarize themselves with this guide, but also consider establishing a sub-team for each standard. Offer opportunities for a diverse group of individuals to lead those sub-teams.
Once the organizational structure is in place, consider the following steps:

**Step 1**
Assess your school’s current practices for engaging families and the community in improving school climate and student success. Invite each member of the action team to review the assessment guide included in this toolkit. Ask for input from the action team members on how well they think the school is doing on each indicator. Compile the results and discuss them with the team and school staff to decide where and how to focus efforts. The action team should also distribute the PTA Power of Partnerships Family Survey to make sure the team’s perspective is consistent with that of the broader school community.

**Step 2**
School principals should review the findings with staff and parent group leaders. Based on the findings of the assessment and survey findings, a plan should be put into action. This guide provides a number of action ideas for each standard to help you get started, as well as success stories showing how real schools have more effectively engaged families. Use the action plan template to document your goals and objectives. Remember, building successful partnerships between families and schools is a process, not an event. One-time events can be a good beginning, but it’s important to make sure there’s a continued connection to supporting student learning. Building a strong parent leadership group will be crucial in assisting school leaders in this endeavor.

**Step 3**
Principals, school staff and parent leadership groups collaboratively present the action plan to the school community for feedback and buy-in. When families feel invited into the development of involvement programs and practices, there is a greater likelihood of success.

**Step 4**
Put the plan into action and have the action team monitor the progress throughout the school year. The action plan should be a living document. If something is not working, collaborate with parent groups to make the necessary changes.

**Step 5**
At the end of the school year, the action team should document the successes and share them with the school community, which includes families, students, teachers, the executive director for that school, and community members.

**Step 6**
As you plan for the next school year, explore how you can build on your accomplishments and use these goals and strategies in your Unified School Improvement Plans.
STANDARD 1 – WELCOMING ALL FAMILIES INTO THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Families are active participants in the life of the school, and feel welcomed, valued, and connected to each other, to school staff, and to what students are learning and doing in class.

Schools are all about relationships. The interactions among teachers, students, families, principals, other school staff, and visitors set the tone for everything else. That’s why the first standard in this guide is about creating a welcoming school community. Walk into any school and you can feel right away if it is a happy, productive place where people enjoy working and learning or if it is not. Greeting parents and family members warmly and treating them with respect is a big reason for why they will be involved with their school environment.

There are two main goals for the standard of welcoming all families into the school community. The first is creating a welcoming climate. When families walk into the school building, they should feel that it is a place where they “belong.” Are there opportunities for families to develop personal relationships with teachers and other school staff, including the principal? Is the atmosphere family-friendly for everyone, not just the “in crowd”? Are there many ways to volunteer and help out, even for parents who may be working two jobs or don’t speak English, live near the school, or have a car?

The Importance of Trust
A study of trust in Chicago schools found that higher achieving schools had higher levels of trust, while schools with the lowest achievement rates had minimal trust. The researchers used four qualities to define trust:

- Respect: Recognizing that each person plays an important role in a child’s education and knowing that parents and educators can talk honestly and openly
- Competence: Feeling that families and educators can create and effective working environment and will work hard to get the job done
- Integrity: Feeling that people keep their word, doing what they say they will do, and always put the best interests of children first.
- Personal regard: Knowing that people in the school community are willing to go out of their way to help each other.

Anthony S. Bryk and Barbara Schneider, Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for Improvement (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2002).
The second goal for this standard is **building a respectful, inclusive school community.** All the school’s policies and programs should reflect, respect, and value the diversity of the families in the community. Does school staff value the contributions of all families and work together with families to identify and address barriers to involvement, such as differences of race, education, and culture? Are events, programs, and activities for families and students low-cost or free? Are they open to the whole family and offered at convenient times and places?

### Engaging Families at Fishkill Elementary

#### The Challenge
Fishkill Elementary is a school of nearly 500 students in New York’s Hudson Valley, approximately 90 miles north of New York City. It serves a diverse community in which many of the parents commute to full-time jobs or take care of younger children at home, making involvement in the school difficult.

#### The Action
To make volunteer opportunities more accessible and more appealing, and thus increasing parent involvement in the school, the Fishkill School Leadership Team decided to initiate a PTA program, “Three for Me.” The principal introduced the program at Parents as Partners Night at the start of the school year. Teachers wore “Ask Me About Three for Me” badges, used in-class introductions to invite parents to complete Three for Me promise cards, and explained how parents could volunteer on committees, at events, in the classroom, or even from home. Throughout the year, the newsletter featured volunteer opportunities, while the program’s coordinator regularly distributed program reminders, progress reports, and volunteer stories.

#### The Impact
Three for Me was a catalyst for parent involvement. Seventy percent of the school’s families now complete at least three hours of volunteer work during the year, with a significant number continuing to volunteer beyond their original commitment. The school has developed a more welcoming climate and a culture of volunteering thanks to this growing network of parent volunteers.

**Action Steps**

**Getting Started**

- Establish a welcoming committee made up of representatives from your school action team who will be responsible for identifying ways to make all families feel welcome.
- Survey family members and school staff to determine how family-friendly your school is.

**What School Leaders and Staff Can Do**

1. Work with the school leadership teams to develop customer service guidelines to be used in the school.
2. Set up a parent help desk or visitor welcome center outside the school office.
3. Conduct meet-and-greet walks in the neighborhoods where students live.
4. Use a professional development day to address assumptions about race, class, and culture.
5. Explore the need for and feasibility of establishing a family resource center in the school.
6. Be accessible and available. It’s one thing to say families are welcomed and valued, but another thing to show it.

**Suggestions to Share With Parent Groups/Leaders**

1. Greet other parents at school activities and events; sit with someone you don’t know and get to know them.
2. Recruit bilingual parents to greet and interpret for families whose first language isn’t English.
3. Budget PTA/PTO or parent group funds to be able to offer family activities at low or no cost so everyone can participate.
4. Work to change the conversations going on over the back fence. If people use ethnic slurs, stay positive and point out the contributions all families can make to the community.
5. Hold meetings in a variety of community locations (e.g., local libraries, a community center, a church) to make them accessible to all.
Resources

_Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships_, by Anne T. Henderson, Karen L. Mapp, Vivian R. Johnson, and Don Davies (New York: The New Press, 2007), examines, among other things, how to know whether your school is really open to partnerships (chapter 3) and how to develop trusting relationships (chapter 4). Chapter 4 ends with a checklist for determining how family-friendly your school is. For a free copy of the checklist and more information about the book, go to www.thenewpress.com/bakesale.

_Building Relationships for Student Success: School-Family-Community Partnerships and Student Achievement in the Northwest_, by Diane Dorfman and Amy Fisher (Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 2002), is a booklet of key research and of promising practices in schools with high poverty rates and large minority populations, including schools on Indian reservations. Go to www.nwrel.org/partnerships/cloak/booklet2.pdf.


_Including Every Parent_ (2003), a guide developed by parents and teachers at the Patrick O’Hearn Elementary School in Boston and the Project for School Innovation, explores specific practices critical to engaging and empowering parents at school. Learn more at www.psinnovation.org.

National Fatherhood Initiative offers programs, workshops, publications, and other materials to encourage men to be involved, responsible, and committed fathers. Go to www.fatherhood.org.

_Tellin’ Stories_, the parent organizing program of Teaching for Change, uses the power of story to connect people from diverse backgrounds. For more information, visit www.teachingforchange.org/parentorg.
**Standard 1 – Welcoming All Families**

Families are active participants in the life of the school and feel welcomed, valued, and connected to each other, to school staff, and to what students are learning and doing in class.

**Goal 1: Creating a Welcoming Climate:** When families walk into the building, do they feel the school is inviting and is a place where they belong?

**Quality of Implementation**

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| Developing personal relationships       | Family volunteers from different neighborhoods and backgrounds are trained to serve as mentors to help other families become more engaged in the school.  
*For example, mentors call new families to invite them to attend PTA/parent group programs, offering to pick them up or meet them at the entrance of the school.* | PTA/PTO/parent group members volunteer to work in the school office to provide information and support to families and students.  
*For example, a help desk is established and staffed by family volunteers and school employees.* | Families are greeted promptly in their home language by friendly front-office staff, who give them correct information and help them connect with appropriate faculty members.  
*For example, a staff member or family volunteer, using the family’s home language, gives a new immigrant family information about the school and a tour of the building.* |
| Creating a family-friendly atmosphere   | The school is a welcoming place where families can drop in and connect with school staff and other families.  
*For example, the PTA/PTO/parent group and school staff together create a* | The school building is easy for visitors to navigate, and the community knows what is going on at the school.  
*For example, signs clearly direct visitors to important places within the school, such as the library and* | The school campus is clean and welcoming to parents/guardians.  
*For example, entrances are clearly marked and a sign inside the front door welcomes families in the main languages of the community.* |
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<td>family resource center, staffed with parent volunteers or school staff fluent in various languages and filled with information in various languages about the school and community.</td>
<td>guidance office, and an outside marquee keeps the community informed of upcoming events.</td>
<td>PTA/PTO/parent group members work with other parents to help them become registered volunteers in the D11 system. For example, those who would like to volunteer are directed to the appropriate parent group member to help with volunteer registration and logging of volunteer hours.</td>
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<td>Providing opportunities for volunteering</td>
<td>The school volunteer program reaches out to parents of all neighborhoods and backgrounds, identifies their unique experiences and skills, and offers varied volunteer opportunities for both at home and school. For example, PTA/PTO/parent group leaders make personal phone calls to diverse parents to solicit their ideas on volunteering and to help connect them to opportunities.</td>
<td>The PTA/PTO/parent group works with the District’s Volunteer Services department and helps recruit and register volunteers. For example, the parent group works with the school to develop a list of volunteer opportunities, within the school, as well as outside the school. This group also works with the Volunteer Services department to facilitate these ideas, as well as register new volunteers.</td>
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Standard 1 – Welcoming All Families, cont.

Goal 2: Building a Respectful, Inclusive School Community: Do the school’s policies and programs reflect, respect, and value the diversity of the families in the community?

Quality of Implementation

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<td>Respecting all families</td>
<td>The school and families from all neighborhoods and backgrounds assume collective responsibility to identify and break down barriers to family engagement related to race, ethnicity, class, family structure, religion, and physical and mental ability. For example, families from different neighborhoods and cultures create family histories that combine to tell the story of the entire school community.</td>
<td>PTA/PTO/parent group members and the school staff work with parents and community members from different neighborhoods and backgrounds to gain their insights on how to make the school more respectful and supportive. For example, families and school leaders discuss how the school will accommodate students who might be absent from school because of holy days.</td>
<td>Families and school staff affirm student cultures and history in school resources, classroom lessons, and activities. For example, PTA/PTO/parent group members from different neighborhoods and backgrounds work with school staff to ensure that media center and classroom materials reflect the diversity of the community.</td>
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<td>Removing economic obstacles to participation</td>
<td>Family and student activities and events are free. The school and PTA/PTO/parent group collaborate to cover the</td>
<td>School leaders and PTA/PTO/parent group and community members work</td>
<td>For family activities, the PTA/PTO/parent group makes a commitment to keep the events free or low-cost.</td>
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<td>costs through the school budget,</td>
<td>for example, fees to participate in after-school programs are waived for low-income families.</td>
<td>together to offer extracurricular activities at no cost.</td>
<td>For example, the school book fair offers a section of new or gently used books donated by other parents to be made available at no cost.</td>
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<td>fundraising, and contributions</td>
<td></td>
<td>For example, the parent group sponsors a dialogue with a children’s author and each family receives a free copy of the author’s book.</td>
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<td>from community businesses and</td>
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<td>organizations.</td>
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<td>Ensuring accessible programming</td>
<td>PTA/parent group leaders and school officials jointly create school-wide procedures and policies to ensure that all parents and students have access to school-sponsored programs and events, including academic services. For example, services such as interpreters during meetings or classroom instruction, transportation, and childcare are consistently provided for both school-based events and school events held in community locations.</td>
<td>PTA/PTO/parent group members and the school staff work together to plan family programs to be held at the school and in community locations such as libraries, community centers, faith-based centers, homes in different neighborhoods, and work sites. For example, the PTA/PTO/parent group organizes a family program about applying effective study skills at an apartment building near the school.</td>
<td>Family activities are held at various times and days of the week to respect parents’ work schedules. For example, a family dinner and science exploration program is held on a weekend evening instead of a weekday.</td>
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Standard 2 – Communicating Effectively
Families and school staff engage in regular, two-way, meaningful communication about student learning.

The lifeblood of any relationship and any organization is communication. Communication is a process through which information is exchanged. Yet many ways that schools give out information, such as handouts, newsletters, handbooks, automatic phone messages, and websites, do not provide an easy and routine way for families to respond. Even parent group meetings are often seen by school leaders merely as a way to get the message out to families. The most effective way to build a real partnership is to create regular opportunities for open, honest dialogue.

For this standard, there is one key goal: **Sharing information between school and families.** All families should feel that the school keeps them informed on important issues and events and that it is easy to communicate with teachers, the principal, and other school staff. Creating the perception, however unwittingly, that a dominant group of parents is in the know while everyone else is in the dark reduces trust and stifles the free flow of ideas.

Does your school offer many different ways to communicate every day? Does the school or parent group survey families at least once a year to find out what’s on their minds and what they think about the school? Are the principal and other school administrators easily accessible to any parent? Is information about current events and issues readily available, not just on a bulletin board? Do the school and parent group make it easy for parents and families to build connections and communicate with each other?

Motivating Parent Involvement
When school staff makes an effort to communicate with and reach out to families, students score higher on tests. A research review by the Harvard Family Research Project found that the following approaches pay off:

- Accommodating parents’ English skills as needed
- Communicating with even those families who don’t attend meetings
- Encouraging parent input and ideas
- Offering opportunities to volunteer
- Assigning homework that calls for parent-student interaction
- Ensuring that parent committees reflect the school’s racial and ethnic mix.

Communicating at Eastwood Elementary

The Challenge
Eastwood Elementary School has long been considered one of the more successful schools in Decatur, Alabama, but even the best schools need to reevaluate old habits and look for new ways to meet today’s challenges.

While school leaders have always known that strong communication is essential in developing a healthy home-school connection, changing technology—coupled with a decrease in stay-at-home parents presented new challenges in communicating effectively.

The Action
An action team with parent representatives from all grade levels identified three strategies to improve communication.

First, after reviewing what several other schools did to facilitate teacher-parent communication, the action team selected an academic planner, approved by the principal, to become the school-wide method for communicating homework, tests, and other classroom activities.

At the beginning of the school year, the principal also gave all families the option of being part of the school’s email system. While the school still uses more traditional means of communication, the expanded use of email allows communication between home and school to occur quickly and easily.

Lastly, the Eastwood parent group created a family resource center to provide a central location for sharing parent group materials, viewing academic planners, and disseminating information about community programs and resources.

The Impact
The academic planner has helped parents become true partners with teachers in supporting student learning, and has the added benefit of helping prepare students and parents for the transition to middle school, where a similar planner is used. The more frequent use of email has increased communication between parents and teachers, and the parent resource center has made parents feel more welcome and more connected to the school and their community.
**Action Steps**

**Getting Started**

- Make use of all channels of communication: NTouch, newsletters, automated phone system, text messaging (also available through NTouch), websites, and the District’s Communications and Community Relations Office.
- Identify parents, community members, local organizations, and businesses that can help strengthen home-school communication; remember the District’s business partnership program and the resources this office offers.
- Make sure all information is communicated in languages and formats to reach all parents.
- Sponsor events that allow educators and parents to interact socially, in addition to parent-teacher conferences and regular school meetings.

**What School Leaders and Staff Can Do**

1. Map the school’s parent-teacher contacts: How often do teachers communicate with families, what are the main topics, and when do they have face-to-face contact?
2. Work with parent groups to establish guidelines for regular communication between home and school (e.g., monthly calls from teachers to parents, home visits, weekly newsletters, NTouch communications).
3. Engage school staff, community members, and parents in developing a parent handbook.
4. Request training and proficiently use the district and school-wide NTouch parent notification system. Request that parents register for your school’s NTouch communications and offer assistance on how to use this system.
5. Establish a method for parents to review their student’s work on a regular basis. Allow for parent comments.
6. Publicize the hours when administrators and teachers are available for parent visits and any procedures for contacting teachers on the telephone or in writing.

**Suggestions to Share With Parent Groups/Leaders**

1. Design and print “happy grams” as an easy way for teachers to regularly report positive behavior and/or achievements to parents.
2. Consider using color-coded lines on hallway walls or footprints on floors, to help direct parents to important places like the school office, parent resource center, and library.
3. Include a two-way communication mechanism, such as a question-and-answer section or mini survey, in school newsletters.
4. Distribute calendars so parents can record upcoming events, assignments, and dates to check with teachers on their children’s progress.
5. Role-play a parent-teacher conference for families and school staff, demonstrating effective ways for parents and teachers to share information and plan for the future.

Resources

*Connecting Families and Schools: Sacramento ACT* (2005), a case study published by the Center for Community Change as part of *An Action Guide for Education Organizing*, tells the story of the Sacramento Area Congregations Together (ACT) home visiting program, which helps schools reach out to families. Go to [www.cccfiles.org/issues/education/actionguide/](http://www.cccfiles.org/issues/education/actionguide/).


The *Family Involvement Network of Educators (FINE)* of the Harvard Family Research Project provides back issues of its electronic newsletters, many of which address issues of diversity, at [www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/](http://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/).

The *National Network of Partnership Schools* at Johns Hopkins University publishes the *Type 2* newsletter twice a year. Named after the second of six types of family involvement—communicating—it shares examples of best practices as well as solutions to challenges. Go to [www.csos.jhu.edu/P2000/type2/index.htm](http://www.csos.jhu.edu/P2000/type2/index.htm).

*Parents and Teachers Talking Together: A Handbook for Facilitators* (2003) outlines a discussion process developed by the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence in Kentucky. It includes a series of questions for parents and teachers to discuss, centered around the two main questions “What do we want for our students?” and “What do we need to do to get what we want?” Order the guide in the Center for Parent Leadership (CPL) Publications section at [www.prichardcommittee.org](http://www.prichardcommittee.org).

*Reaching Out to Diverse Populations: What Can Schools Do to Foster Family-School Connections?*, by Chris Ferguson (Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2005), recommends that schools build on cultural values, stress personal contact, foster communication, and offer accommodations such as child care, translation, and transportation. Read more at [www.sedl.org/connections/research-briefs.html](http://www.sedl.org/connections/research-briefs.html).
### Standard 2 – Communicating Effectively

Goal 1: Sharing Information Between School and Families: Families and school staff engaged in regular, two-way meaningful communication about student learning.

#### Quality of Implementation

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<td>Using multiple communication paths</td>
<td>School staff communicates in numerous ways, both formally and informally.</td>
<td>School staff collaborates with the parent groups to develop connections with families through multiple two-way communication tools, including personal calls, emails, and notes.</td>
<td>The school keeps families informed of upcoming events in a variety of ways, including regular print and electronic notices, in the languages spoken in the community.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>For example, school leaders take part in community forums in different neighborhoods and use social networking online to engage families.</em></td>
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<td><em>For example, parents who are not fluent in English are given up-to-date information through bilingual staff or parent volunteers who are available at times convenient for these families.</em></td>
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<td>Surveying families to identify concerns</td>
<td>Parent survey results are reflected in the Unified School Improvement Plan.</td>
<td>The parent survey is translated into multiple languages and communicated in various ways, including in person, online, in print, and by phone, and made available to all parents. Results are posted on the school website and discussed.</td>
<td>School staff completes a parent involvement survey (school staff may also want to involve PTA/parent group leaders). The results guide the development of parent involvement programs.</td>
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<td><em>For example, teachers, administrators, and families develop programs and practices collaboratively, and community members to meet</em></td>
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<td><em>For example, the school staff members and possibly the PTA/parent group leaders meet</em></td>
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<td>the needs of parents as identified in the surveys.</td>
<td>For example, the school collaborates with a parent group to plan morning coffees or convenient times to discuss survey results with parents and solicit additional feedback.</td>
<td>over the summer to discuss the survey results and plan strategies to address barriers.</td>
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| Accessibility of the principal   | The principal personally welcomes families into the building and meets regularly with parents in small groups or one-on-one as needed, in school and in different neighborhoods.  

For example, the principal takes suggestions from parent group leaders to develop an agenda for small-group dialogues to be held in different neighborhoods on issues such as school security or homework expectations. | The principal is accessible for scheduled meetings with groups of parents or individually at different times of the day.  

For example, the principal hosts monthly coffee hours that are open to all parents and community members to discuss a variety of topics. Meeting times vary from month to month to accommodate parent schedules. | The principal shares information about school-wide issues at parent group meetings, with opportunities for individual follow-up discussions by appointment.  

For example, the principal discusses with parent group leaders times the principal can attend meetings to discuss topics such as school-wide test results and plans to address gaps in learning. |
| Providing information on current issues | A team of administrators, teachers, families, and community representatives strategically look at developing issues that affect families to determine whether | All school families are kept informed of developing concerns in the school community.  

For example, print and electronic newsletters are generated on a | The principal keeps the parent group leader(s) informed of current school issues and concerns.  

For example, the principal meets monthly with the parent group leader(s) to review issues that may |
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<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Level 3: Excelling</th>
<th>Level 2: Progressing</th>
<th>Level 1: Emerging</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indicators</td>
<td>there is a need for a school-wide response.</td>
<td>regular basis. When serious concerns arise, families are immediately informed through email, and letters are sent home.</td>
<td>affect families and student learning. The issues discussed are determined solely by the principal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitating connections among families</td>
<td>For example, the principal meets monthly with a parent-school-community team to address school-wide issues and determine appropriate responses.</td>
<td>School staff and parent groups jointly develop programs to help parents connect with each other.</td>
<td>School staff and parent groups provide opportunities for parents to get to know each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitating connections among families</td>
<td>School staff works to facilitate a strong parent group, offering ideas to help this parent group make others feel welcomed.</td>
<td>For example, school staff and PTA/parent group jointly plan an orientation program at the beginning of the year and distribute a calendar and a school-wide directory with staff and parent listings.</td>
<td>For example, teachers collaborate with parents in their class and the school parent groups to plan informal get-togethers (e.g., parents of 4th-graders breakfast club).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitating connections among families</td>
<td>For example, school staff may offer suggestions like events with icebreaker activities, help setting up listservs, blogs, and social networking pages so parents may be connected at all times.</td>
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</table>
Families and school staff continuously collaborate to support students’ learning and healthy development both at home and at school, and have regular opportunities to strengthen their knowledge and skills to do so effectively.

Engaging families in their children’s learning can have a powerful impact on student success, not just in school, but also throughout life. The number one goal in Colorado Springs School District 11’s business plan is to demonstrate improvement of student achievement. When families are involved both at home and at school, students earn higher grades and test scores, come to school more regularly, like school more, behave better, and are more likely to graduate and go on to post-secondary education. However, to become engaged in ways that boost achievement, many families will need information, encouragement, and support from school staff and parent groups.

For this standard, there are two goals. The first is sharing information about student progress. Families should be kept fully informed of how their children are doing in school, as well as how the entire school is progressing. How do the school and parent group ensure that parents and teachers communicate about student progress, beyond conferences and report cards? What opportunities do parents have to learn what good work looks like for their child’s age and grade? How does the school use standardized test results to inform parents of which student skills need strengthening? How do the school and parent group report on school progress to the community?

Students with Highly Involved Parents Do Better in School
Combining data from 77 studies, Professor of Education Bill Jeynes found that the achievement scores of children with highly involved parents were higher than those of children with less involved parents. This finding held across all ages and ethnic groups and all measures of achievement, including grades, test scores, and teacher ratings. Forms of involvement that required considerably more time, such as reading, expressing high expectations, and communicating with one’s child, had a greater impact than setting rules and attending school activities.

The second goal for this standard is **supporting learning by engaging families**. Families should have opportunities to learn how to be active participants in their children’s learning at home and at school. Are families invited to observe their children’s classrooms? In what ways do school staff develop families’ capacity to strengthen learning at home? How are families connected with opportunities for after-school learning?

### Students for Success at Fremont High

**The Challenge**
Fremont High School in Sunnyvale, California, is in a fairly affluent school district, but its own student body is economically diverse, and many students lack academic support at home. Approximately 28 percent of the students are English language learners, and there is a high student turnover. These factors contributed to the school having the lowest test scores in the district.

**The Action**
To raise student achievement, the school’s PTSA and National Honor Society collaborated to launch the Students for Success Tutoring Club. Four days a week, students can stop in to receive free peer tutoring in any key subject, including all levels of math, literature, social studies, science, and foreign language. Help is also provided for standardized-test preparation. Students may be referred for tutoring by their teachers or stop in on their own for help with homework or to study with friends. At any given time, 15 to 25 tutors are available. Supervision is provided by a combination of PTSA volunteers and paid staff. Attendance is voluntary and flexible, and incentives are offered.

**The Impact**

**Tips for Success**
Interactive homework can build students’ confidence by prompting them to share their work and ideas with family members. When parents and children are encouraged to talk regularly about schoolwork, parents learn more about what’s happening in class. Interactive homework also facilitates communication between parents and teachers about children’s work, progress, or problems. Studies of a program called Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS), in which teachers design weekly homework that calls for children to talk to someone at home about the task assigned, have found that students’ writing skills, grades, and test scores improved with the program. Parents talk with and support their children, but don’t teach or do the assignments.

During the first year of the program, 109 National Honor Society peer tutors and 550 registered students participated. On average, 130 students stopped in each day. Approximately 50 percent of the students who regularly attended improved by at least one letter grade by the end of the first semester. Not only that, but the partnership between the school, the PTSA, and the National Honor Society has made the library—the place where tutoring sessions are held—a cool place to be, and has helped restore a sense of pride in Fremont High School.

**Action Steps**

**Getting Started**

- Start with the end in mind. Determine what parents need to know and need to be able to do to support their children’s academic success. Also determine how family and community engagement can support school goals (especially within the Unified School Improvement Plan).
- Link all events to student learning, including those activities focused on making all families feel welcome.

**What School Leaders and Staff Can Do**

1. Ask parents to take an active role in reviewing student portfolios.
2. At a “Parents Make the Difference” evening, give parents an overview of what students are learning, how students are assessed, what parents should expect, and how parents can help.
3. Institute student-led parent-teacher conferences.
4. Develop a family-school compact focused on student achievement.
5. Make it a policy that teachers send home materials at least once a month, such as interactive homework assignments to help families work with their children.

**Suggestions to Share With Parent Groups/Leaders**

1. Create a checklist and tip sheets for effective parent-teacher conferences.
2. Work with school leadership to conduct workshops on interpreting standardized test data.
3. Invite teachers and professionals from the community to speak at meetings on various topics.
4. Provide workshops for parents and students on topics such as study skills, individual curriculum areas, and college and career planning.
5. Provide parent involvement tips and suggestions through signs at the school, articles in the newsletters, and as a regular section on the school’s webpage.
Resources

All Kinds of Minds offers a parent toolkit to provide a better understanding of learning processes and strategies for mathematics, reading, and writing. Go to www.allkindsofminds.org.

Conway Middle School Student-Led Conferences (2001), from the Jefferson County (KY) Public Schools in cooperation with the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence and Louisville, Kentucky’s Conway Middle School, outlines the purpose and roles of student-led conferences for students, parents, and teachers. Find the guide in the Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership (CIPL) section under Parent Resources at www.prichardcommittee.org.

The Education Trust works for the high academic achievement of all students and offers resources that link parent involvement to student learning. Click on the Parents and Community tab at www2.edtrust.org.

The Florida Partnership for Family Involvement in Education offers tip sheets for parents on getting involved in their children’s education and achievement. Go to www.floridapartnership.usf.edu/resources.html.


A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement, by Anne T. Henderson and Karen L. Mapp (Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2002), reviews the research regarding family-school partnerships and student achievement. Read it at www.sedl.org/connections/resources/evidence.pdf.

PTA provides many resources to help schools and parents support student success. Check out PTA.org, particularly the Topics and Programs tabs.

TIPS: Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork, developed by the National Network of Partnership Schools, is a program for interactive homework. It makes learning a partnership between the student, family, and teacher. Learn more at www.csos.jhu.edu/P2000/tips/index.htm.

Title I of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) includes several parent involvement requirements. For an overview of these requirements, see No Child Left Behind: What’s in It for Parents, by Anne T. Henderson (Parent Leadership Associates, 2002), available in English and Spanish in the Center for Parent Leadership (CPL) section under CPL Publications at www.prichardcommittee.org.
Standard 3 Rubric – Supporting Student Success

Goal 1: Sharing Information About Student Progress: School staff continuously collaborates with families to support students’ learning and healthy development, both at home and at school, and have regular opportunities to strengthen their knowledge and skills to do so effectively.

Quality of Implementation

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| Ensuring parent-teacher communication about student progress | Teachers discuss students’ individual learning styles, experiences, strengths, and academic and personal needs with families, then develop learning goals to support academic success at school and at home.  
For example, the school has adopted a personal education plan for parents, students, and teachers to establish education career goals. | Teachers and guidance counselors regularly contact parents with positive news as well as concerns about their children. Parents/families have an easy way to communicate with teachers on a regular basis.  
For example, each classroom has a website where class assignments and other school-wide events are posted. Parents can ask general questions or schedule meetings with teachers as needed. | Parents can contact teachers through email, notes, or phone messages and receive a timely response. Teachers make contact with all families at the start of the year to establish positive relationships.  
For example, teachers in high school send home a welcome note to all families inviting their comments and providing an email address or phone number. |
| Using standardized test results to increase achievement | Parents are included on school or school district academic standards committees and discuss how to raise | Families have opportunities to learn how to interpret testing data. | Parents are informed about standardized tests. |

For example, the school has adopted a personal education plan for parents, students, and teachers to establish education career goals. 
For example, each classroom has a website where class assignments and other school-wide events are posted. Parents can ask general questions or schedule meetings with teachers as needed. 
For example, teachers in high school send home a welcome note to all families inviting their comments and providing an email address or phone number.
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<td>expectiations and achievement for every student.</td>
<td>For example, a co-chair of the standards committee is a position established and reserved for parents only.</td>
<td>For example, family members and teachers are invited to participate in workshops, sponsored by the school and/or parent group, to learn how the school uses standardized test results to improve student achievement.</td>
<td>The principal presents the school's academic goals at the beginning of the school year and reports on progress made the previous year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing school progress</td>
<td>The principal collaborates with parents/parent groups to present regular progress updates on reaching academic goals and develops strategies to support improvement.</td>
<td>The principal collaborates with parents/parent groups to facilitate discussion between school staff and families on needed academic improvements.</td>
<td>For example, the principal or other school administrators host parent meetings for each grade or subject to present academic goals for the year and to solicit feedback.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>For example, parent groups work with school staff to match mentors with struggling students.</td>
<td>For example, family-school dialogues focus on increasing the diversity of students in the gifted program or the number of girls taking advanced math and science.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Engaging families in classroom learning</td>
<td>The parents/parent groups help organize a database of parent and family skills, expertise, and backgrounds, through which teachers can find resources.</td>
<td>Families and teachers engage in innovative ways to collaborate on classroom learning.</td>
<td>Families and teachers work together to provide resources for upcoming units of study. For example, grandparents discuss life under segregation during a lesson on civil rights.</td>
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<td>For example, teachers invite community groups and</td>
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<tr>
<td>For example, a parent who is an artist is brought in to work with students to create a school mural.</td>
<td>families to their classes to share information about their cultures and demonstrate how foods from their cultures are prepared, helping students learn history and culture, as well as math and chemistry skills.</td>
<td>The school offers programs on parenting skills that will help promote learning. For example, an expert is invited to give a presentation to help parents deal with the tough issues of raising teenagers.</td>
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Developing family ability to strengthen learning at home

Teachers and parents/parent groups plan regular family learning events at workplaces and community locations. For example, workshops on a variety of topics that help parents support learning are held during lunchtime at a local manufacturing plant or at a childcare site in the late afternoon.

The school and parents/parent groups work together to provide families tools to support student learning at home. For example, a series of workshops teach parents strategies for supporting reading development for different grade levels.

The school offers programs on parenting skills that will help promote learning.

Promoting after-school learning

The school partners with community organizations (including faith-based) to provide after-school programs for children and families. For example, the local Boys and Girls Club works with

The school and parent groups invite families to learn more about the value of after-school activities. For example, the parent groups host an Afterschool Alliance Lights On Afterschool

The school informs parents of after-school opportunities.

For example, fliers about school-based as well as community-based program are sent home with students. Email, Web announcements,
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>parents, students, and school staff to create a program that meets the</td>
<td><em>parents, students, and school staff to create a program that meets the recreational and academic needs of students. The program is available five days a week and is free of charge.</em></td>
<td><em>event to raise awareness about the importance of after-school programs.</em></td>
<td><em>and phone calls in families’ home languages are also utilized.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>recreational and academic needs of students. The program is available</td>
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<tr>
<td>five days a week and is free of charge.</td>
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</table>
Dear Families,
The best way to make sure every student in our school succeeds is to build a strong partnership between families, the school, and the community. The survey below gives you the opportunity to tell us what our school is doing well to support this partnership and what we can do better.

If you would like to help tally and analyze the results, please let us know.
—The Family Involvement Action Team

<Provide the names and contact information of the team members here.>

### Welcoming All Families into the School Community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. When I walk into the school, I feel the school is inviting and that this is a place where parents &quot;belong.&quot;</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. The school's policies and programs reflect, respect, and value the diversity of the families in the community.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Students at the school are treated fairly no matter what their race or cultural background.</td>
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<td>☐</td>
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<td>4. I feel welcome at PTA/parent group meetings.</td>
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### Communicating Effectively

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<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
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<tr>
<td>5. The school keeps all families informed about important issues and events.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<td>6. The school makes it easy for families to communicate with teachers.</td>
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<td>7. The school communicates with families in multiple ways (e.g., e-mail, phone, website).</td>
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<td>8. I can talk to the school principal when I need to.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. My child’s teacher communicates with me on a regular basis.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. It's easy to get a translator if I need one.</td>
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Continued on next page
The Power of Partnerships Family Survey, continued

### Supporting Student Success

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<tr>
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<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11. My child’s teacher keeps me well informed about how my child is doing in school.</td>
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<td>12. I understand the academic standards my child is supposed to meet and how the curriculum is linked to those standards.</td>
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<td>13. My child’s teacher and the school give me useful information about how to improve my child’s progress.</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. All students are challenged to do their best.</td>
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### Speaking Up for Every Child

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<tr>
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<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
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<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
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<tr>
<td>15. If the school can’t help me, they will connect me to someone who can.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>16. I understand the rules and requirements for student dress, language, and behavior.</td>
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<td>17. The school keeps me informed of my rights under federal and state laws and policies and helps me exercise those rights as needed.</td>
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<td>18. I feel empowered to advocate for my own child’s and other children’s success in school.</td>
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### Sharing Power

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<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
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<tr>
<td>19. The school consults with me and other families before making important decisions (e.g., changes in curriculum, school policies, dress code).</td>
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<td>20. The school provides opportunities for families to develop relationships and raise concerns with school leaders, public officials, and business and community leaders.</td>
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### Collaborating with Community

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<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
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<tr>
<td>21. The school connects students, families, and staff to expanded learning opportunities, community services, and community improvement initiatives.</td>
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Comments: ____________________________________________________________

Your name (optional): _______________________________________________
Family-School Partnership Action Plan – Template

School/Location: _____________________________________________________________________ Year: ____________________________________________________________________

Lead Person(s): ________________________________________________________________

Standard: ____________________________________________________________________________

Goal(s): _______________________________________________________________________________

Results (How will you know when your school reaches this goal? What does success look like?): ____________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

Activities, Practices, Policies Persons Responsible, Including Lead(s) Timeline Resources and Funding (What do you need and who can supply it?) Evaluation (How will you determine whether the activity achieved its desired effect?)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities, Practices, Policies</th>
<th>Persons Responsible, Including Lead(s)</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Resources and Funding (What do you need and who can supply it?)</th>
<th>Evaluation (How will you determine whether the activity achieved its desired effect?)</th>
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**Family-School Action Plan-Example**

**Family-School Partnership Action Plan – Template**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School/Location:</th>
<th>Roundtree Elementary School, Anytown, State</th>
<th>Year:</th>
<th>2009–2010 school year</th>
</tr>
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</table>

**Lead Person(s):** Frank Johnson, Standard 1 action team leader  
**Standard:** Welcoming All Families into the School Community (Standard 1)  
**Goal(s):**  
1. When families walk into the school building, they feel the school is inviting and is a place where they “belong.”  
2. The school’s policies and programs reflect, respect, and value the diversity of the families in the school community.  
**Results (How will you know when your school reaches this goal? What does success look like?):** More families are participating in school-sponsored events; parents and teachers report increased communication between home and school; increase in volunteer hours; increased presence of principal during student drop-off and pick-up; improved student attendance/decrease in tardiness and absences.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Activities, Practices, Policies</th>
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<th>Evaluation (How will you determine whether the activity achieved its desired effect?)</th>
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| 1. Hang welcome signs in all the languages spoken in the homes of the students. | School staff member, parents/family members | Start Aug. 1; Done by 1st day of school | Translators—bilingual or multilingual volunteers  
Signs—$___ from PTA/school funds; discount or donation from local print/copy shop | Applicable to all activities:  
- Feedback (formal end-of-year survey and informal comments) from family and community members  
- Improved family and community perception of the school  
- Increased presence of parents and family members in the school  
- Increased participation of families in school and PTA events |
| 2. Work with the art, social studies, or history teachers to organize a classroom activity in which students make state and national flags representing their heritages; hang the flags in the school. | School staff member, parents/family members  
Coordinate with art/social studies/history teachers | Talk to teachers at start of school year;  
Create flags as fits with curriculum; Host event to unveil flag display | Art supplies—$___ from PTA/school funds, donations from community businesses/organizations  
Place to hang flags—e.g., cafeteria, multipurpose room, library, gym, halls | |
| 3. Create reception area by school office for parents and other visitors, with comfortable chairs, reading materials, and access to coffee, tea, and water. | School office staff, parent/family member, community member  
Coordinate with PTA fundraising chair | Launch plan at start of school year; Funds by Nov.; Complete by start of 2nd semester | Furniture/accessories—$___ raised in special fundraiser, or furniture donated by families/businesses  
Space—near front office  
Beverages/cups/napkins—$___ from PTA funds; prepared by office staff | |
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<td>4. Offer a wide range of volunteer opportunities—in classrooms/school, for PTA programs, and at home.</td>
<td>School staff member, teacher representative, parent/family member, community member Coordinate with PTA volunteer coordinator</td>
<td>List ready to go at Back-to-School night; Ongoing</td>
<td>Training for volunteers, depending on opportunity—PTA/school/community leaders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Create a school policy that ensures that all families are able to participate in school activities/events, regardless of their ability to pay.</td>
<td>School staff member, parents/family members, community member Coordinate with principal (or designee), PTA fundraising chair</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Funding to cover activity costs for all parents, or parents unable to pay—PTA fundraising (specify)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Host at least two school events (fun or informational) each semester at community locations to increase access/participation.</td>
<td>School staff member, parents/family members, community member Coordinate with principal (or designee), PTA programs chair</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Space—commitments from community partners (e.g., library, community center, neighborhood place of worship)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* When filling out this action plan, be sure to record the names—not just titles—of the persons responsible. The descriptors given here are suggestions as to which stakeholders should be represented. The persons listed here will likely form the action team for the standard. Be sure to designate one person to be the lead on each activity.