

Parent/Community Involvement Strategy and Activities

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Parents and community members are very important groups to include in any strategy plan for equity. Most have a strongly ingrained sense of fairness and equity and want to believe that everyone has an equal chance and equal opportunity. Parents are generally very interested in their children's futures. They want and need help in preparing their children for the future. They need to know the statistical facts on men's and women's participation in the labor force. They also need to be aware of changing and expanding family roles and need the tools to assist children in making informed choices about career and life options.

Parents and community members can be strong advocates for change within the educational system. Educators should identify supporters of equity, whether individuals or groups, use their energies, and involve them creatively so they can take an active role in making change happen.

- Begin by identifying organizations and individuals who have supported and advocated equity in the past. Encourage teachers and other staff members to make suggestions.

Some groups have long been supporters of equity; the League of Women Voters (LWV) and the American Association of University Women (AAUW) are obvious examples. Include others, such as the chamber of commerce and parent-teacher associations, whose interest in equity may come from another perspective.

- Recognize the influential role parents and community members play as change agents. Of-

fer opportunities for them to participate in equity promotion by

- providing equal representation of men and women on advisory and other school/community committees;

- asking for their assistance in identifying speakers on expanding life options in work and family;

- developing co-op sites for work experience, including nontraditional jobs; and

- working together on school/community employment equity conferences, such as "Expanding Horizons," "Career Expo," or "Choices," in which students hear from people employed in nontraditional careers.

- During student registration, provide parents with materials that describe the options and opportunities available to their children. Hold *information sessions* for parents and students, which include a question-and-answer period, to discuss the changing labor market and inform them of the support services available to students enrolled in nontraditional programs. Provide parents and students copies of the school's policy prohibiting discrimination against students and give them information on who to contact if they have questions.

- Use *parent conferences* as an opportunity to discuss a student's career goals, again identifying where parents can get assistance in career planning for their child.

- Parents and community members can become involved with equity efforts through a number of *learning experiences*, including
 - classroom interviews, which could focus on careers and family issues such as child care.
 - field trips that investigate career opportunities in local business and industry. Such outings build involvement and develop insight into the community's employment needs.
 - presentations and special programs by universities and technical colleges.
- Inform the community about equity efforts through a *variety of media*, including the local newspaper, radio, and newsletters. These publicity efforts can relay facts about the changing labor market as well as changing families. Develop *brochures and booklets* to help parents and their children understand why and how to plan for expanded options.

Tips and Cautions

- Scan the community's resources. Involve a variety of groups in the equity initiative; avoid focusing only on women's organizations. Look for natural allies, such as 4-H, universities and technical colleges, Urban League, YMCA and YWCA, the AAUW, and the LWV. Community-based organizations, such as the chamber of commerce and Jaycees, also can be good sources of support.
- Be aware of those who may not support the equity issue and prepare strategies to deal effectively with opposition, fears, or concerns.
- Tailor messages to address community concerns, then focus equity efforts on those concerns.

Suggested Resources

American Association of University Women. *How Schools Shortchange Girls*. Washington, DC: Author, 1992.

_____. *Shortchanging Girls, Shortchanging America*. Washington, DC: Author, 1990.

Bingham, Mindy, Lori Quinn, and William P. Sheehan. *Mother Daughter Choices*. Santa Barbara, CA: Advocacy Press, 1988.

Bingham, Mindy, and Sandy Stryker. *Women Helping Girls With Choices: A Handbook for Community Service Organizations*. Santa Barbara, CA: Advocacy Press, 1989.

Grayson, Dolores, and Pam Miller. *GESA (Gender/Ethnic Expectations and Student Achievement) . . . for Parents*. Earlham, IA: Gray-Mill Consulting, 1991.

Guidelines for Selecting Bias-Free Textbooks and Storybooks. New York: Council on Interracial Books for Children.

This publication provides guidelines to parents and educators concerned with biased, discriminatory attitudes on the basis of sex, race, age, class, and handicapping conditions.

Martin-McCormick, Lynda. *Organizing for Change: PEER's Guide to Campaigning for Equal Education*. Washington, DC: National Organization for Women Project on Equal Education Rights (PEER), 1982.

This resource provides a step-by-step description of planning and managing a community campaign for sex equity in schools.

Otto, Luther. *How to Help Your Child Choose a Career*. New York: M. Evans & Co., 1984.

A guide for parents that includes information on changing roles of women and men.

Skolnick, Joan, Carol Langbert, and Lucille Day. *How to Encourage Girls in Math and Science: Strategies for Parents and Educators*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1982.

Information Sheet: Parents and Careers

The home has great influence on youngsters' attitudes toward work, school, and society in general. Parents can help their children of all ages consider careers that reflect their interests and abilities.

Parents are important resources of career information. Working together with educators, parents can encourage and support their children as they explore career choices. They can help their children explore a number of alternatives while keeping in mind the changes occurring in the job market. The school guidance counselor is a good source for current career information. In junior and senior high, schools generally give career interest surveys that identify a student's interests in relation to possible career paths. Parents can ask to see the results and review it with the counselor and your child.

Sex bias and sex-role stereotyping can hinder children's career choices, whether they are female or male. Parents can encourage children to consider career choices based on their interests and abilities, not their sex.

There now are more women in the work force (69 percent of the female population ages 18 to 64) than outside of it. However, women earn about 70 cents for every dollar their male counterparts make. It is still true that a college educated woman, on the average, does not earn as much as a man who has only a high school diploma. The wage "gender gap" is due in part to the fact that women workers continue to be highly concentrated in "female intensive" occupations, such as secretarial work.

While women's general wages may be lower than those of men, the money women bring home is very important to their families. Women are the primary source of support for nearly 11 million households. In two-income families, wives working full-time bring home 40 percent of total earnings.

Choosing a career is a long and serious process, beginning in preschool and extending over the years. Parents can become involved in helping their children make sound career decisions by

- building awareness of the changing job market, job market demands, and the required training for jobs. They need to be open to the concept of equal access and opportunities. They also need to promote the idea of jobs and careers for people, rather than jobs and careers for boys or jobs and careers for girls;
- helping children of every age explore all kinds of career possibilities;
- encouraging daughters and sons to pursue careers in areas that maximize their strengths and options while planning for careers of the future; and
- encouraging their children to explore the course preparation and training needed for occupations that will provide sufficient income and economic security.

Advocating for Equity for Girls and Young Women

Adapted from "An Action Agenda for Equalizing Girls' Options" by Girls' Clubs of America, Inc., 1985.

Girls' Clubs of America offers the following additional suggestions to demonstrate how any individual can be a catalyst for change for girls and young women.

In the Family

- Watch your language; watch other people's. Don't talk in sexist stereotypes.
- Try role reversal at home. Let Dad do the dishes, son bathe the baby, and daughter mow the lawn or take out the garbage.
- Encourage girls to talk as much as boys. Listen just as intently to what they say.
- Watch television with your children. Help them analyze what they are seeing. Praise nonsexist programs. Protest stereotyping to networks, program producers, and sponsors.
- Include boys in discussions about sexual responsibility. Your expectations for responsible sexual behavior of both sexes should be equal and explicit.
- Encourage and praise risk taking in girls and care taking in boys.
- Avoid rescuing girls in situations where you would let boys learn for themselves.
- Demonstrate to girls the math and science used in everyday activities.
- Use the language of skill and success to compliment girls.
- Talk to girls and boys about balancing family responsibilities between genders.
- Introduce girls to women and men who work both in traditional and nontraditional jobs.

In the Schools

- Work with other parents and teachers to foster nonsexist environments from nursery school onward.
- Urge educators to introduce career awareness and information in elementary school.
- Look at textbooks. Are women discussed in history, science, and art? If not, create a committee for change. Talk to the Board of Education.
- Ask school administrators to develop viable programs and strategies to ensure girls equal access and time on computers and other equipment.
- Work with school committees to develop a plan to register girls in advanced science, math, and computer courses.
- Is there a stay-in-school program for teen mothers in your school? If not, find out how you can start one.
- Are team sports programs for girls organized, supported, and funded equitably to boys' programs? If not, talk to the principal, the coaches, and the press.
- Help counselors get girls interested and participating in nontraditional vocational training.
- How many of the vocational education programs' counselors are women? Campaign for more.
- Develop a network of working women to supplement schools' efforts in career guidance to help route girls to the work of their choice or explore new choices.
- Recommend awareness training for faculty and staff on stereotyped language, books, and programming, all of which impede girls' progress.

In the Community

- Review and audit services for girls in your community. Work with women's organizations and political groups to strengthen and expand them.
- Go to United Way meetings; make sure allocations are distributed equally between programs for girls and programs for boys. Speak out on the issue of equitable funding.
- Make sure girls' programs are designed actually to meet their needs and serve them, not just count them.
- Raise the issue of adequate and equitable funding in every affiliation you have.
- Get more women on the boards and allocation committees of funders that serve young people, including foundations, the United Way, and service organizations.
- Be an advocate for girls where allocating resources for youth employment programs are concerned.
- Work for adequate community funding of teenage pregnancy prevention and education programs.
- Lobby to get girls' issues on the agenda of public commissions and private women's organizations.
- Advocate equal athletic and recreational opportunities for girls in schools and community programs.
- Volunteer your time and expertise to programs serving girls.
- Contribute financially to programs serving girls.
- Start a Girls' Club.

In the Workplace

- Portray real people, not stereotypes, in your advertising.
- Develop and publicize interest in girls' programs.
- In your community relations programs, address girls' needs through giving and volunteering.
- Be sure women participate in decisions about corporate giving.
- Open nontraditional summer jobs to girls and boys alike.
- Give girls equal opportunities in entry-level positions and promotional practices.
- Serve as a mentor to girls and young women whom you employ.
- Provide special support to young women faced with discrimination or sexual harassment on the job.
- Strengthen flexible scheduling, day care provisions, and parental leaves to deliver the message that female and male workers are equally important family members.

In the Nation

- Support only those candidates for public office who support equal opportunity for girls and women.
- Contribute time and money to office-seekers who support women's issues.
- Help girls develop political skills and awareness by acting as liaison between organizations for girls and political campaigns and lobbying efforts.
- Get involved in women's commissions and put girls' issues on the agenda of national women's organizations.
- Support teenage pregnancy prevention initiatives.
- Write your Washington, DC, representative in support of equal access for girls to vocational and professional schools, athletic programs, and scholarships.
- Support job development programs designed for female teenagers.
- Communicate with your Washington, DC, representatives in support of the Women's Educational Equity Act to combat stereotypes in education.
- Write your elected representatives in support of the Equal Rights Amendment.
- Understand that the ERA has been reintroduced in Congress; it is not a dead issue.

Parent Brochure

Adapted from Cooperative Educational Service Agency 10, 725 West Park Avenue, Chippewa Falls, WI 54729; (715) 723-0341. The brochure was prepared for distribution at a school career fair.

... To Guide Your Children to Success in the Year 2000 Through Career Planning and Vocational Preparation

Did You Know:

- A female graduating now probably will be part of the work force for more than 30 years—whether or not she marries or has children.
- A male graduating now probably will be in the work force for more than 40 years. If he marries, his wife probably will have an important share in the economic support of the family.
- More women are entering the trades and technical fields, while men are beginning to choose nurturing professions such as nursing and teaching in primary schools.
- Most work can be done by people of either sex who prepare and train for it.
- The law is on your child's side. It is her or his legal right to receive fair consideration for any job or training program for which she or he is qualified.

As Parents, We Can Make Sure Our Children Have the Facts:

- That our daughters understand that they probably will be working for pay outside their homes for a significant portion of their lives.
- That our sons realize that, if they marry, they probably will be married to women working for pay outside their homes and that they will need to contribute to or be responsible for caring for children, for the home, and for family needs.
- That our daughters and sons recognize the variety and range of paid work available to them, as well as the duties, requirements, and pay that accompany various jobs.
- That our daughters and sons are aware of the educational programs that can help them to choose and prepare for rewarding work, both outside and inside the home.
- That our daughters and sons know the negative effects stereotyping can have on their lives and the ways that they can overcome stereotyping. In the past, some jobs have been primarily male or primarily female and have limited children's career choices.

Vocational Programs in Your School Provide for Both Girls and Boys to Learn About:

- their interests and abilities.
- tomorrow's jobs.
- computer applications.
- work and families.
- how to get and keep a job.
- how to be a leader through belonging to a vocational student organization.
- the skills necessary for entry-level employment.
- education and job training opportunities beyond high school.

All vocational programs are open to male and female students because career choices should be based on interests and ability, not tradition.

For more information, contact your high school guidance counselor.

Working with Local Vocational Advisory Committees

Adapted from the Virginia Department of Education's Vocational Sex-Equity program. The original text has been changed or expanded upon to accommodate the issues, concepts, and language used in this publication.

Local vocational advisory committees are one of the most important links with business and industry in the community. Their influence can be very important in the effort to eliminate sex bias and stereotyping.

Some Suggestions

1. Seek the advice and support of the vocational advisory committee concerning activities that support sex equity.
2. Use the local advisory committee to help develop specific goals to eliminate sex bias and to increase nontraditional enrollments.
3. Use the advisory committee to recognize successful vocational students, including students in non-traditional activities.
4. Use the advisory committee to help identify and praise employers who hire nontraditional workers.
5. Be sure the council is made up of both male and female members.
6. Include people with nontraditional employment experience as members of the committee.
7. Develop a presentation on vocational education featuring nontraditional and traditional students. Use the advisory committee to help arrange for the presentation at civic organization meetings.
8. Contact civic and professional groups and offer to have nontraditional students speak to the members concerning their experiences and future plans.
9. Seek the assistance of professional organizations in providing encouragement and support to students enrolled in nontraditional courses, programs, and work experience.

