

Strengthening the Role of Parents on the Partnership Action Team



Inviting parents to serve on the Partnership Action Team -- or any other team responsible for planning and enacting school goals and activities -- involves them as decision makers. Parent membership offers a unique opportunity for teachers and other staff members on the team to hear about the insights, perceptions, and concerns parents have as they shape the school's vision for learning. It also keeps parents informed about what other parents are thinking and feeling, an important benefit of family involvement.

"Parents need to advocate for their involvement in decision-making in public schools," one principal said. "Many don't realize that they make a difference in school practice and procedure. Parent-family partnerships are of critical value to schools. The more involved parents become, the better the school."

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— school principal

Strategies to promote family involvement on Action Teams

How can school leaders nurture parent membership on the Action Team? Effective parent leaders represent all of the cultural groups and neighborhoods of students in the school. They are also willing to share not only their own observations and experiences, but also those of the parents they represent.

"Diverse cultural groups need outreach. Then they'll tell you what they need to know and learn about participating in school wide decision-making," another school leader commented.

Following, are some tips for getting good parent representation on the Partnership Action Team:

- Invite two to four parents to serve on the team. Asking one person to serve as the lone "parent representative" on a team of educators comfortable with and

knowledgeable about school programs and policies can be an intimidating duty.

- Have alternates ready to fill in if regular parent members aren't able to attend each meeting, to ensure a parent voice on the team.
- Provide parent members with a brief information sheet about the Action Team's goals, accomplishments, and pending issues before their first meeting.
- Offer parents their own training session to on how to represent the views and concerns of other families in the school and explain more complex matters such as student testing.

What is the Parent Role on a Building Leadership Team?

To participate meaningfully as an equal member of the school Leadership Team in all aspects of decision making and to represent the perspective of all families as it applies to the work of the Team.

- *To participate in school efforts to encourage and maintain family involvement directly related to student learning and success*
- *To support and assist the school in developing and maintaining active family-school-community partnerships using the "Six Types of Family-School-Community Partnerships."*

— REACH Family Involvement Team

(Responsive Education for All Children)

- Assign one Action Team member to mentor each new parent member, acting as a resource for questions about the history, goals, and challenges of the team.

- Feature a “parent report” near the start of every meeting to clearly value the parent perspective and to ensure that parent members can bring new and developing issues to the team’s attention.

“Involve parents from the beginning when developing vision and goals to ensure their ongoing support and continuous involvement.”

-- school principal

Train school staff team members how to welcome and work with parents on the Action Team and on other school decision-making committees. Clarify the role of parents on such teams and offer practical suggestions for how staff can help them participate meaningfully as equal members of the team, i.e. by avoiding educational jargon, explaining acronyms, and specifically inviting parents to comment on issues under discussion.

- Schedule team meetings at various times of the day or evening when it is convenient for parents to attend. Meetings may have to be scheduled outside of the school day.

Other ways to nurture parent leadership

- Engage the school PTA/PTO in issues and decisions related to school goals. What does the team need parent feedback on?
- Appoint a liaison from the school parent group to the Action Team; ask the liaison to report on team discussions at each parent group meeting.
- Survey parents about their awareness of school programs and their challenges as parents. Surveys work in many ways -- via phone calls, mailed postcards, or online. Be sure to report survey results and expected action back to parents!

- Host a parent forum on student learning or development or other issues of interest to families, complete with resources for families.
- Form Action Team goals that advance school goals. Ask team members to – all together -- complete an inventory of the [Six Types of Family-School-Community Partnerships](#).
- Invite representatives of various school groups to meet, talk, and integrate plans and activities with the Action Team.

Parents need to be on board as decision-makers from the first meeting on. “Involve parents from the beginning when developing vision and goals to ensure their ongoing support and continuous involvement,” one principal advised.

Schools can also involve parents as decision-makers by

- Inviting parents to participate in early interventions and in problem-solving concerning their child
- Including parents as members on parent advisory councils, school governance councils, the [REACH](#) building leadership team, and hiring and steering committees
- Informally asking parents’ opinions
- Informing families about the principal’s open door policy.

