**National Standards for Family-School Partnerships**

**A New Way of Leading**

In a 2002 research synthesis authored by Anne T. Henderson and Karen L. Mapp, and published by SEDL, “A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement,” it was concluded that when families are involved in their children’s learning, both at home and at school, their children do better in school. The report also points to specific types of involvement as being especially beneficial to children’s academic success.

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<tr>
<th>FINDING 1</th>
<th>Programs that link learning improve student achievement</th>
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<td></td>
<td>• Family Night on math and literacy</td>
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<td>• Family-teacher conference that involve the students</td>
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<th>FINDING 2</th>
<th>Speaking up for children protects &amp; promotes their success</th>
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<td></td>
<td>• Become knowledgeable about the operations of schools and the laws that govern those operations</td>
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<td>• Expect only the best from their children and for their children</td>
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<th>FINDING 3</th>
<th>All families can contribute to their children’s success</th>
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<td>• Teaching their children the importance of education</td>
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<td>• Sending their children to school ready to learn each day</td>
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<th>FINDING 4</th>
<th>Community organizing gets results</th>
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<td>• Provide expanded learning opportunities</td>
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<td>• Build board-based support for increased funding</td>
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<td>• Provide quality after school programs</td>
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**What are the National Standards?**

The National Standards for Family-School Partnerships are voluntary guidelines to strengthen parent and family involvement on behalf of children in schools and other programs. The six (6) standards and their quality indicators provide PTAs, schools, and communities with the components that are needed for highly effective family-school involvement programs.

PTA leaders and all those interested in more effective family/school/community connections will find the National Standards for Family-School Partnerships to be a valuable resource and catalyst for action.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>STANDARD 1</th>
<th>Welcoming All Families Into The School Community</th>
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<td>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.</td>
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<th>STANDARD 2</th>
<th>Communicating Effectively</th>
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<td>Families and school staff engage in regular, two-way and meaningful communication about student learning.</td>
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<th>STANDARD 3</th>
<th>Supporting Student Success</th>
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<td>Families and school staff continuously collaborate to support students’ learning and healthy development, both at home and at school and have regular opportunities that will support their success.</td>
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<th>STANDARD 4</th>
<th>Speaking Up For Every Child</th>
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<th>STANDARD 5</th>
<th>Sharing Power</th>
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<td>Families and school staff are equal partners in decisions that affect children and families and together inform, influence and create policies, practices and programs.</td>
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Background

Our nation acknowledged the important role of parent involvement through its enactment of the 8th National Education Goal:

Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional and academic growth of children.

Utah PTA supports this goal. The standards were designed to raise the level of expectation about how family-school involvement programs can improve student achievement and life success by engaging families in true partnership with educators and community leaders.

How Were the Standards Developed?

The standards were developed by the National PTA in collaboration with parent involvement researchers and other national leaders. They are endorsed by more than 30 professional education and family-school involvement organizations. The standards clearly delineate those practices that have been shown to lead to success and high-quality parent involvement programs.

The standards were developed to be a practical tool for meeting the threefold purpose of the national standards:

1. To promote meaningful parent and family participation
2. To raise awareness regarding the components of effective programs
3. To provide guidelines for schools that wish to improve their programs

How Can My PTA Use These Standards?

Before you begin to develop new or improve on existing family-school involvement programs, form a committee or action team including all of the stakeholders—parents, teachers, administrators, support staff and community leaders. Be sure everyone involved understands the group’s purpose: to recognize the importance of parent and family involvement, review the standards, look broadly at current programs or practices at your school and make recommendations about what steps are needed to initiate positive change.

Developing genuine collaboration is critical. The views of all stakeholders should be considered and valued and no one group should control the outcomes. Establishing trust and a true partnership will take time, but the extra effort is well worth the lasting benefits that can be gained. Meaningful change requires thoughtful, incremental steps. Laying a solid foundation can make all the difference in the final outcomes and success of your programs.

Creating an Action Plan

When parents, educators and community leaders make parent involvement a mutual goal, they can begin to work together as a team to create an action plan for reaching and maintaining the standards. Give each step adequate attention to ensure the overall effectiveness of your plan. Set realistic and achievable goals. Remember: Success Breeds Success. Accomplishing obtainable goals and then setting additional ones, works better than reaching too high and trying to achieve too much in the beginning.

When implementing your action plan, consider local needs, priorities and the demographics of your school and community. Involve those who will be instrumental in carrying out the plan to help develop the steps or procedures to implement it. This uses a bottom-up rather than top-down team approach which allows for greater support and cooperation from everyone involved.

Family involvement should not be seen as an “add-on” program feature, but rather as an essential component in the ongoing goal of improved student success. In order to be most effective, the family-school involvement plan should be fully integrated into the overall school or program improvement process.

Making Progress

Once the groundwork is laid and all stakeholders understand the value of the partnership, then redefining, reshaping and “scaling up” planned activities and goals maintains the momentum of program change. As noted, family involvement is a process, not merely a series of “one shot” activities or plans carried out and then retired. It is crucial that the standards be implemented in an ongoing pattern of planning, action and evaluation on a consistent basis. Each measurable success fosters a pattern of continual, meaningful partnership.
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.

One of your duties, as Community Involvement Commissioner, is to oversee volunteers. Volunteers help our Utah public schools be strong. A volunteer can be many things—a role model for the students, an extra pair of hands to help teachers and staff, or a liaison between school and the community.

Have the local PTA board appoint a Volunteer Coordinator whose job will be:

Recruiting Volunteers

- Needs Assessment: Before you begin recruiting volunteers, you need to first assess the needs of your school. You do this by consulting teachers, principal, and staff. By doing so you will be able to identify needs, set goals and objectives, and determine the best way to utilize volunteers. Then do an assessment of the parents’ involvement and interests.
- Recruiting: The idea of recruiting doesn’t need to be overwhelming. The biggest complaint that we hear on the state level is “I signed up to help and no one ever called me.” Remember “many hands make light work.”

Suggestions

- Develop personal relationships:
  - Have a welcoming committee for first day of school. Get dual language volunteers.
  - Have someone from your PTA become a liaison and go to all teacher/principal monthly meetings.
  - Set up a help desk in the office staffed by volunteers and school employees.
  - Hold family friendly back to school nights (tours of the school, how to volunteer, procedures, etc.).
  - Have newsletter spotlight different teachers each month to get to know them.
  - Have newsletter spotlighting rest of school staff.
  - Have a table at all school events. A poster which shows or lists the activities held at your school last year or that have just been completed will bring attention to your table. Have sign-up sheets available as well as a list of needs based on the completed school assessment.
- Create a family-friendly atmosphere:
  - Hold back-to-school night with a family atmosphere (games on playground, teacher info in classrooms, etc.).
  - Have a family resource center (things about school, community, PTA).
  - Have signs to direct to important places (library, guidance counselor).
  - Have an outside marquee to keep the community informed.
  - Put a welcome sign or map at front door.
  - Use students to help make other families feel welcome.
- Provide opportunities for volunteering:
  - Make personal phone calls to all parents in the school community, regardless of nationality. Invite them to participate.
  - Use teachers as a way of knowing and contacting more volunteers.
  - Send volunteer invitations home through letters or emails in the home language.
  - Provide opportunities for students of different backgrounds to volunteer and invite parent help.
  - Invite families, grandparents, or local business volunteers for reading days, math nights, carnivals, or dance festivals to spark interest from all student’s extended family.
  - Make the invitation to volunteer personal, powerful, and meaningful. Using a poster, point out some of the activities your PTA helped with last year and what volunteers were needed for.
- Respect all families:
  - Have a “family traditions” night or week.
  - Do a character development activity on differences and similarities.
  - Hold a family game night.
  - Understand different culture’s views on school.
  - Invite, invite, invite.
  - Do not leave out the working parents. Working parents can volunteer—there are many ways to help that can be accomplished at home such as assisting with the school directory, preparing fliers and hand-outs, coordinating volunteering lists, making phone calls, etc. Some parents may be willing to help with evening activities or early morning activities.
  - Involve men and couples. The best way to involve anyone is just to ask. Men are often more willing to help if they can work with their spouse.

In a recent survey, 49% of respondents said they had not joined the PTA because no one asked. This is probably also true with volunteers. Extend the invitation to volunteer and do it often.

- Remove economic obstacles to participation:
  - Hold events that cost a minimum or are free (at least one (1) per year).
  - Find a donation or budget for a free event for the family at the school.
  - Hold read-a-thons.
  - Hold events like dads and donuts, grandparents and popcorn or cool dudes and fun.
  - Hold family game nights/math events.
  - Hold after school programs.
  - Hold a book exchange (no cost, just bring book to exchange or minimum charge).
  - Be inclusive! We never want parents or potential volunteers to feel alienated. If there are a variety of languages spoken at your school, try to have someone at your booth who can communicate in those languages. If you have a high percentage of Spanish speaking families, try to have someone who is bilingual in English and Spanish. There are forms and brochures available in Spanish at the National PTA website, www.pta.org. Use the “Three for Me” program with cards as an easy way to get parents to volunteer.
It is important that you work with the PTA President and the school principal to establish communication with home and community. Public relations is important to the success of your school. As more people come to know how wonderful your school is, students and families will reap the rewards.

Suggestions:

- Publish a newsletter which goes out monthly as well as a web page that is updated as needed.
- Help conduct a needs assessment with your president to determine course of action for the year. The needs assessment form can be found in the president’s handbook.
- Use multiple ways to contact families: newsletters, fliers, e-mail, automated phone calls, text messages.
- Meet with PTA president and principal over the summer to discuss plans and to coordinate strategies to address school needs.
- Invite your principal to monthly meetings.
- Invite the principal to discuss school-wide test results and plans to address gaps in learning.
- Meet monthly with the principal to review his/her perspective on issues that affect families.
- Plan socials to discuss needs assessment results, issues, and school plans.
- Hold meetings at various times to accommodate different parent schedules.

By working with these groups, you can coordinate volunteers and projects that will help both your school and the community group.

Helping parents with ongoing education is another way that our PTAs can help support the students at home and at school. Holding family-oriented nights such as computer nights, math nights, or reading programs will help not only the student, but the family, as they learn together. Use your community services to help with these events.

Suggestions:

- Share information about student learning.
  - Provide information about standards and academic content for all grades to parents.
  - Work with families, principal, and school staff to identify and address barriers to student learning.
  - Inform parents about school academic programs, PTA activities and programs, and how to get help if needed.
- Provide support for learning opportunities.
  - Encourage parents to visit and volunteer in their child’s classroom.
  - Offer workshops or other activities to help families understand how to support learning at home.
  - Assist principal and teachers to understand successful approaches to engaging parents in their child’s learning.
  - Disseminate information to parents about community resources.
- Support learning at home.
  - Encourage families to attend a back-to-school night where they can join PTA, sign up to volunteer, meet teachers, and learn about the school.
  - Organize an exhibit of student projects in community settings, inviting the entire family.
  - Disseminate summer packets and reading helps at the end of the school year.
Part of your job as Community Involvement Commissioner is to get to know and work with your elected officials from your school, city, and state. These officials have the ability to help your school in many ways. They can lend assistance when needed. They can help make sure your school is safe. They can also answer many questions and have the knowledge of how best to proceed when you have concerns.

The legislative process is important to our schools, and the more we understand it the better we can use it to help improve our schools. Each level of government has its own directives and abilities. Get to know and work with your Legislators to make sure that voices of all children are being heard.

Suggestions:

- Understand how the school and district operate:
  - Give parents information on the school’s mission, goals, and organizational structure.
  - Provide a school handbook that is available in print, on the school website, and in various languages as needed.
  - Offer workshops, sponsored by the school district, for family members about school and district programs, policies, and resources, and the skills to access them. Offer these in various languages and locations in the community.

- Understand rights and responsibilities under federal and state laws:
  - Distribute written materials about parent involvement mandates in state and federal programs, such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA).
  - Invite district staff to talk about parent rights and responsibilities under state and federal laws.

- Learn about resources:
  - Distribute information about available programs and resources in the school district and in various languages.
  - Co-host a fall orientation with the school staff where families can learn about programs for academic and social growth, tour the school, and meet the entire school staff with interpreters available.
  - Identify parent leadership and parenting programs or classes available and explore ways to offer them to families.

- Resolve problems and conflicts:
  - Develop and distribute a guide identifying and resolving problems at school and make it available on the school website and in print, in appropriate languages.
  - Jointly plan, with school staff, strategies to help parents, teachers, and students identify and resolve problems and conflicts at school.
  - Offer conflict resolution classes to learn effective ways to resolve conflicts at home and at school.

- Develop families’ capacity to be effective advocates:
  - Provide monthly tips on the school website and in print on how to be an advocate for student success.
  - Provide workshops and other information sessions to help parents learn how to ask the right questions about their child’s progress in school.
  - Include in the school handbook a number of resources that help prepare parents to be advocates for their and other children.

- Plan for the future:
  - Invite local employers to speak at a school career expo and ask them to offer field trips to work sites.
  - Offer information sessions to help parents and students identify career interests and goals.
  - Partner with businesses to offer internships for students during the school year and summer.

- Have smooth transitions:
  - Plan spring orientation programs to help prepare students for the next grade level or school.
  - Assign “buddies” to new students and connect families to parent mentors.
  - Organize tours of the school students will attend next.

- Engage in civic advocacy for student achievement:
  - Help families learn about political issues affecting education.
  - Sponsor local candidate forums during election campaigns.
  - Invite school board members to give an informal budget briefing.
  - Hold “parent café conversations” on subjects identified through the needs assessment, resulting in families advocating for these improvements before the local school board.

Families are empowered to be advocates for their own and other children, to ensure that students are treated fairly and have access to learning opportunities that will support their success.
Sharing Power

Families and school staff are equal partners in decisions that affect children and families and together inform, influence and create policies, practices and programs.

Each school should have a Community Council, which (by Utah law) must contain more parents than administrators and teachers as members. The parents are elected by the parents at the school, and the teachers are elected by teachers. The chairman of the committee cannot be the principal, but the principal (by law) sits on the committee. The chair should be elected by the members of the council.

While PTAs are not directly involved with formation of the community councils, we encourage all of our members and PTA boards to attend the meetings and give input. It is the responsibility of the Community Council to set policy, direct the use of the Trust Lands Funds, set safe walking routes, approve school safety evacuation plans, and develop the school improvement plan.

Be sure that your PTA is as involved with the community council as possible. Learn the law and help your school follow the law as closely as possible.

Suggestions:

- Have a voice
  - Invite parent involvement at PTA/PTSA meetings to discuss policies, issues, and solve problems.
  - Be part of a planning team at school which oversees policies, practices, safety issues, planning, and other decisions regarding education, such as the Community Council or Parent Improvement Team.
  - Attend School Board meetings which are a great venue for working together to inform, educate, and collaborate on decisions that affect all children in our community.

- Address equity issues
  - Use a Needs Assessment to determine barriers to family involvement and student success.
  - Partner with organizations like Headstart, Title One, etc., to educate, involve, and solve equity issues.

- Develop Parent Leadership
  - Introduce PTA Programs for opportunities in leadership and volunteering through a forum such as Back to School Night.
  - Utilize the results of a needs assessment to determine how to better involve parents and educators in the education process.
  - Educate, encourage, and empower parent leadership on all levels by recommending attendance at PTA Leadership Conferences.

- Connect Families to Local Officials
  - Promote programs that create positive relationships with law enforcement such as DARE and Officer Friendly.
  - Encourage attendance at School Board meetings which provide opportunities to meet and understand our district officials.
  - Provide a venue for dialogue with state and local officials by holding a Meet the Candidates Night.

Collaborating with Community

Families and school staff collaborate with community members to connect students, families and staff to expand learning opportunities, community services and civic participation.

Community collaboration covers several areas. Each one is important to the success of the children that we serve.

Community Support Groups

Many are groups that help the child before or after school. They can be community based or religion based.

Some examples are:
- Boys and Girls Clubs
- Boy Scouts
- Girl Scouts

By working with these groups, you can coordinate volunteers and projects that will help both your school and community group. If you are having a carnival, the community groups can help with set up, etc. If you are having a computer night or science fair, many of the students can get merit badges or other rewards for participating.

Businesses

Businesses have a vested interest in the education of our students. The best place to contact businesses is through the Chamber of Commerce for your city. This can be found by going to www.chamberofcommerce.com. Put in your city and state, and it will give you the information on how to contact your Chamber of Commerce. Contact the President of your chamber and invite him/her to attend your PTA meeting. Keep in mind that businesses can be used for more than just money. If you are having cultural nights, invite some of the ethnic businesses to come and present. If you are having computer nights, invite the computer stores, etc. Also invite the businesses to allow employees to come in and do volunteer work in your school. They have a lot of information and a lot to give as well as gain as we work together.

City Officials Elected and Non-elected

Elected officials are your Mayor and City Council members, County Commissioners, School Board members (both State and Local), the Chief of Police, Fire Chief, etc. Invite these members to join your PTA and attend your PTA meetings. They can share your concerns and help you with safety issues, health issues, etc. They can also be a great source of information and a resource to your schools and the students. They are a great resource for PTA meetings throughout the year.

State and Federal Elected Officials

Your school has one or more elected officials. These are your State Representative and State Senator as well as your Congressman and National Senator. Invite them to participate in PTA meetings and school activities. Be sure that you send your PTA newsletter to all of your elected officials so they know what is going on in your school. Share the good things that are happening.