

Creating Family, School, & Community Partnerships

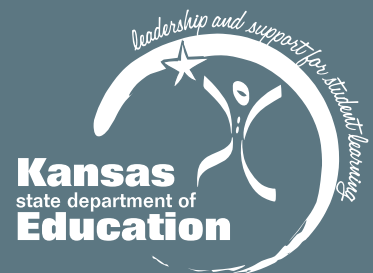
Featuring

Successful Parent Involvement Practices in Kansas Schools



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Special thanks to:

All the schools who shared with us their parent involvement practices, and to Nancy P. Kraft, Ph.D. for her assistance with this publication.

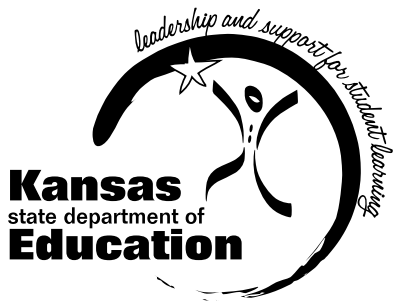
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Introduction

In January of 2008, the Kansas State Board of Education endorsed the new PTA National Standards for Family School Partnerships. The PTA National Family School Partnership Standards were updated to reflect current research and improve family school partnerships and parent involvement practices.

The new standards shift the focus from what schools should do to involve parents to what parents, schools, and communities can do together to support student success. To reflect this change, the standards have been renamed the National Standards for Family School Partnerships.

The standards provide a comprehensive guideline that schools can use to determine how successfully they are implementing family school community partnerships. The new and updated PTA National Standards for Family School Partnerships are:

- 1. Welcoming all Families in 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.
- 2. Communicating Effectively** – Families and school staff engage in regular, meaningful communication about student learning.
- 3. Supporting Student Success** – 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.
- 4. Speaking up for Every Child** – Families are empowered to be advocates for their own children, to ensure that students are treated fairly and have access to learning opportunities that will support their success.
- 5. 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.

- 6. Collaborating with Community** – Families and school staff collaborate with community members to connect students, families, and staff to expanded learning opportunities, community services, and civic participation.

The National Standards for Family School Partnerships provide a foundation from which to build strong parent involvement policies and partnerships for all Kansas Schools. The following pages highlight examples of parent involvement in schools and school districts across Kansas. While parent involvement is alive and well in many schools, we are sharing these schools as exemplars of parent involvement and to inspire educators and parents in other schools to also implement practices that address the National Standards.

The case studies were developed through surveying schools about best parent involvement practices and then following-up with telephone interviews. Each example lists relevant demographic data, which specific standards are being addressed, a narrative explaining how these various standards are implemented in these schools, and concludes with contact information.

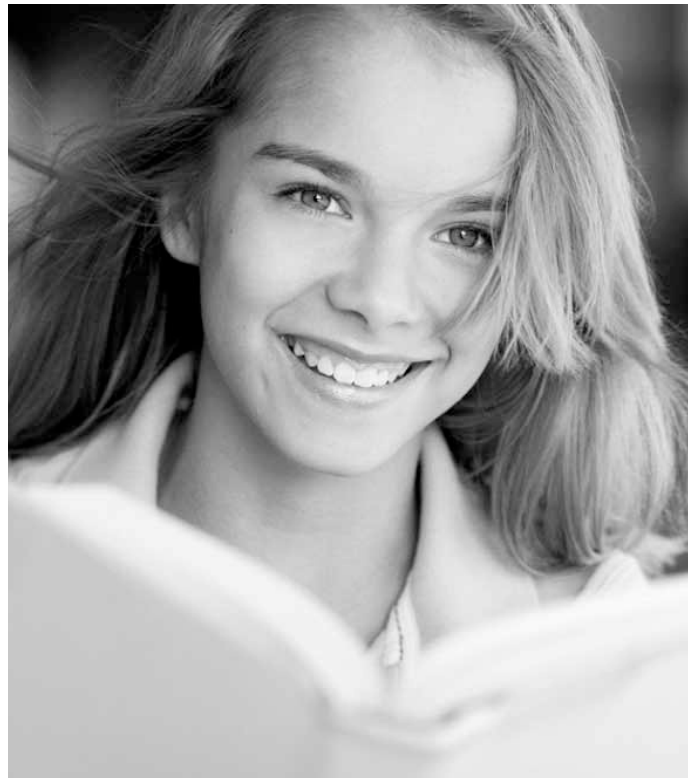


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National PTA Standards for Family, School, and Community Partnerships Showcased in Case Studies

National PTA Standards

School and/or USD	Standard 1 Welcoming all families	Standard 2 Communicating effectively	Standard 3 Supporting student success	Standard 4 Speaking up for all children	Standard 5 Sharing power	Standard 6 Collaborating with community
Anthony ES		X		X	X	X
Apache ES			X			X
Avondale West ES			X			X
Dighton JR/SR HS	X		X	X		X
Franklin ES	X	X			X	X
Great Bend USD	X	X	X			
Hugoton ES	X		X	X		
Moonlight ES	X	X	X			
Nelson ES			X			X
Obee ES	X	X	X			X
Phillipsburg ES	X	X				X
Prairie ES	X		X			X
Ruth Clark ES			X			
Ware ES	X		X			X
Wichita USD	X	X	X	X	X	X

Note: While all schools/USD's that are showcased in this addendum address most, if not all the National PTA Standards, the case studies primarily provide examples of how these schools/USD's address specific standards identified above.



Parent Involvement as the Norm at Anthony Elementary School

Anthony Elementary School uses multiple strategies to implement a variety of parent involvement activities. This study illustrates how several of the PTA National Standards are addressed which include: Standard 2) communicating effectively; Standard 4) speaking up for every child; Standard 5) sharing power; and Standard 6) collaborating with community.

Anthony ES, located in Anthony-Harper USD in south central KS, has had much success addressing the new National Standards for parent involvement. The impetus for trying new strategies to ensure more parent involvement was staff participation in a workshop that focused on the impact of poverty on students and families.

Taking ideas they gleaned from this workshop, staff began to question how they might be able to increase parent involvement at their school. For instance, with parent-teacher conferences, instead of focusing on how many parents attended they turned their attention to which families were missing and how they could more effectively meet the needs of these families as well. Realizing that transportation to and from conferences was a challenge for some families, school staff then generated alternative ways to deliver the information to families who were unable to attend parent-teacher conferences.

Staff also realized that, if they wanted all parents to be involved, they should be proactive in making positive contact with families. Staff believed that parents would be more willing to be involved if they developed a positive relationship with their children's teachers.

The parent teacher organization (PTO) at Anthony ES has been very active with up to 25 parents participating regularly in meetings and various fund raising activities. In addition to promoting parents as volunteers at the ES, the PTO has raised money to support special projects at the school, such as purchasing 6 X 8 foot "smart boards" for many of the ES classrooms.

Other parent involvement events have included the well-attended annual Book Fair where an additional 20 families get involved on a regular basis in helping to organize and run the book fair. Anthony ES also

Demographic Statistics for Anthony ES (USD 361)

Total number of Students	340
Economically Disadvantaged	56.47%
African American	2.35%
Hispanic	6.76%
White	86.76%
Other	4.12%

Reading – Proficient and Above: 87.2% of all students; 82.4% of free and reduced lunch students

Math – Proficient and Above: 90.6% of all students; 86.7% of free and reduced lunch students

promotes parent involvement through regularly scheduled reading, math, and science nights. A popular activity at reading night is people dressing up as characters from favorite books, who then come and read these books to the children and parents. Science nights also involve parents and children in a variety of hands-on science activities.

Another popular event that actively involves parents is "Healthy Kids Night", two of which are held annually – one in the fall and in the spring. In addition to focusing on physical fitness, parents and children alike participate in activities focused on healthy snacks and games where they can be physically involved. Favorite activities at this event include frisbee golf and roping activities.

Anthony ES uses multiple methods for keeping parents informed. An innovative example of this is a special newsletter that has been developed by a parent for other parents, whose children are new to kindergarten and who are unfamiliar with the "goings-on" and routines associated with school. This newsletter introduces parents to the school and shares information concerning picking up and dropping off children, a daily school schedule and other useful information (see a copy of this newsletter on the next page).

Other communication strategies include a communication system that enables all parents to be contacted simultaneously. For example, this system is used to notify parents when children will be taking the state assessments or to remind them of other upcoming events at the school. The local newspaper is also used to share information with parents. Technology, via emails to parents, is becoming more prevalent as more and more parents have access to email either at home or through work.

Parents are invited, and do participate on Anthony's School Intervention Teams (SIT's), so between 50 and 70% of the SIT's have parent representation. Parents do take advantage of this opportunity to share their points of view and perspectives. Parents are also actively involved on the Site Council which meets four times/year, as well as the Coordinated School Health Committee, where parents are instrumental in making important school-based decisions and helping to develop policies, such as the school's Wellness Policy. PTO, as shared earlier, provides an important outlet for parents to speak up for every child and to share power in the school.

Anthony ES has also established partnerships with many area businesses and community-based organizations and collaborates with them regularly. Examples of these include the local Kiwanis, who have supported the Accelerated Reading program at the school and have provided bikes for children who have met their quarterly reading goals. Eligible children's names go into a hat, and at the end of the year, bikes are awarded to three children. Another successful partnership is with Youth Friends, which supports and promotes volunteerism in the school. Youth Friends recruits and screens individuals who then serve as volunteers and mentors to the children.

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Anthony Elementary

2008/2009 School Year

Are you ready to have a

If you're like most parents, you can't believe that your little one is ready to start Kindergarten. You're probably also aware that the Kindergarten classrooms of today are not like the ones you went to.

So what's different? At Anthony Elementary School (AES), students are split into four classes, each with their own teacher and para-educator. These classes have both Kindergarteners and first graders. Classes are structured so that students can move at an appropriate pace for their needs and also be challenged.

Think of what they're learning in the following way. What you learned in first grade is

what Kindergarteners are learning now. Your student might be reading by the end of the school year, perhaps sooner. Math, science, computer skills and more are all a part of the curriculum. Students participate in art activities and physical education.

As you probably know by now, students at AES attend Kindergarten all day. Gone are the 1/2 days of class as we experienced. The reasons behind this move are to provide students more time to learn the information and be allowed to move at a speed that is just right for 5 and 6 year olds. We have more to teach...so we need more time. Studies have shown that 5 and 6 year olds can handle a full day of learning quite well. And with

the chances your student has had to pre-learn material in preschools and daycares — they are ready!

You will be pleasantly surprised at the level of learning your Kindergartener will operate at this year. Get ready...it's going to be a fun ride!



Special Times to Know

7:30

Earliest students can be dropped off at school. Students go to the gym at the north side of building to wait for recess. Breakfast is available for \$1.50 in the lunchroom.

8:05

Morning recess on the south playground. Not required.

8:20

Students begin their school day.

3:30

Students school day is over.

Picking Up / Dropping Off

At AES, teachers are more than willing to work with the arrangements and needs of its families. Some parents like to pick up students at the classroom door at the end of school. Some families have students getting on buses or walking home. All of the options are taken care of for your students.

You only need to do the following:

- Be prepared to inform the teacher your child's options for going home. If they walk, what door should they leave from and so on.
- Prepare your student to know how they will leave the building each night—especially if your schedule changes.



Daily Schedule

Although some classes do things a bit differently, a typical schedule for Kindergartners is the following:

8:20	Unpack bags, Attendance
8:30	Math Meeting / Calendar
9:00	Math / Reading
10:00	Literature
11:00	Lunch / Recess
12:00	Reading / Math
1:30	Recess
2:00	Handwriting
2:35	P.E. and Music
3:30	Dismiss

Music

Music is taught by Stephanie Hawkins. Students attend music class for 20 minutes every day. There are two performances during the school year; one before Christmas and one in April.

P.E.

Jason Busche teaches P.E. at AES. Students have P.E. everyday during the last 20 minutes. They work on traditional physical education skills as well as activities that enhance coordination.

Counselor

Weekly, the school counselor, Kathie Kersten, visits each class to talk with students about various topics.

Library

Students also visit the library once a week for a story and the chance to check out books.



AES NEW Website:
harper.aes.schoolfusion.us

Party, Party, Party!

You will have the opportunity to help classes celebrate the holidays. Your teacher will contact you to volunteer to provide snacks or activities for parties.

- Halloween
- Christmas
- Valentines
- Easter

Students also have the option of celebrating birthdays with their class. Teachers will let you know their procedures for setting up these celebrations.

AES stresses that any invitations for parties outside of school must be provided for all children in the classroom. Students should not bring invitations for a select group of students to school.



Anthony Elementary
FOCUS

Ready to help?

There are several ways for you to get involved in your child's education.

- Teachers offer parents the opportunity to volunteer in the classroom. Contact your teacher to find out how you can help.
- AES has a strong parent group called, **FOCUS**. Meetings will be announced and all levels of volunteering is needed such as two book fairs, Red Wheel Fundraisers, Family Nights, Pizza Fundraisers, Label

collecting, and more!

- Additional school supplies are always welcome for donation.
- In the Spring, the school sponsors a Field Day. There will be several volunteer opportunities for this event.
- YouthFriends is a great program that encourages adult mentoring for students.

Welcome to AES, Kindergartners!

Implementing Character Education as a Key to Student Success at Apache Elementary School

The following example of parent involvement in the Apache Elementary School in the Shawnee Mission USD is an example of how a tool for parents and children that reinforces character education and life skills impacts student achievement and positive parent involvement. It also exemplifies how involvement from others in the community makes a big difference in student learning. PTA National Standards supporting parent involvement in this example include: Standard 3) supporting student success and Standard 6) collaborating with community.

During the 2007/08 school year, the Apache ES in the Shawnee Mission USD, with support from the school's PTA, implemented a project focused around "Uncle Dan's Report Card" to support children's learning. *Uncle Dan's Report Card* is a 9-week checklist for practicing and recognizing the non-academic behaviors that help children to be successful in school and in life. Based on an actual 1914 "Home and School Report Card" of Daniel L. Brenner, his niece, Barb Unell, developed a tool, "Uncle Dan's Report Card," for parents that helps them to teach their children the behaviors that they need to become good students, as well as good citizens.

The behaviors addressed in the *Report Card* include: 1) personal responsibility such as participating in chores at home, following directions, being prompt, remembering to take books and notes to and from school, etc.; 2) positive relationships developed by being truthful and honest, using good manners, respecting self and others, etc.; and 3) learning readiness that includes reading at home, eating healthy meals with the family, getting sufficient exercise, sleep, etc. Parents are encouraged to help teach and reinforce these behaviors with their children. (For more information about Uncle Dan's Report Card visit: www.uncledansreportcard.org).

In conjunction with this project the school sponsored several workshops for parents of children in kindergarten through the 3rd grade, where the developers of *Uncle Dan's Report Card* met with the parents and discussed how to use the Report Card as a tool to support children's citizenship and learning skills. Parents also learned what kinds of

Demographic Statistics for Apache ES (USD 512)

Total number of Students	354
Economically Disadvantaged	56.78%
African American	20.34%
Hispanic	12.43%
White	22.08%
Other	12.15%

Reading – Proficient and Above: 87.6% of all students; 85.3% of free and reduced lunch students

Math – Proficient and Above: 88.2% of all students; 83.3% of free and reduced lunch students

specific activities would enhance and assist their children's learning in school.

To supplement these workshops, children also had numerous opportunities to learn about, and participate in, this program through regular and "surprise" visits from "Uncle Dan" (Bob Unell). Every Monday "Uncle Dan" came to school to have lunch with the children. This was also an opportunity for them to talk more in-depth about the various concepts and behaviors covered in the *Report Card*. Older children in the 5th and 6th grade at Apache were also involved, but their participation consisted of studying the historical context of the ideas conveyed through the report card and discussions of how these concepts applied to their own learning as well. The vast majority of the parents reported that *Uncle Dan's Report Card* proved to be a useful tool in reminding them to teach and reinforce certain behavioral skills in their children.

Parents commented that using the *Report Card* had made a difference with their children, both academically and behaviorally.

At a celebratory event at the end of the school year the children were asked to respond to the question, "who was the Uncle Dan that had made a difference in their own lives." Responses were heart-warming

as children shared who the influential adults were in their own lives that provided them with support and encouragement.

Because this was such a successful project during the 2007-08 school year, a decision was made to continue “*Uncle Dan’s Report Card*” during the 2008-09 school year. The plan was to focus on the three incoming classes of kindergarten children and their parents. During the first week of school, “Uncle Dan” visited with the classes each day and discussed the character traits, that will be incorporated into the children’s curriculum throughout the year. During that week parents were also introduced to Uncle Dan, along with the Report Cards, and learned how they can use this as a tool to support and reinforce their children’s success in school.

Although spearheaded by the Apache ES PTA, there was also overwhelming support for this activity by the ES school principal and 100% of Apache’s ES teachers. According to Lauri DeNooy, PTA President of Apache ES, this project has had a large impact on students and families alike; and, as the year progressed, it helped to create a very positive atmosphere in the school with children eagerly looking forward to “Uncle Dan’s” visits.

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Uncle Dan's Report CardSM

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY	WEEK 1	WEEK 2	WEEK 3	WEEK 4	WEEK 5	WEEK 6	WEEK 7	WEEK 8	WEEK 9
Do morning and evening chores 									
Bathe and brush teeth regularly 									
Follow directions and be prompt 									
									
POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS	WEEK 1	WEEK 2	WEEK 3	WEEK 4	WEEK 5	WEEK 6	WEEK 7	WEEK 8	WEEK 9
Be truthful and honest 									
Do acts of kindness 									
Use good manners 									
Respect self and others 									
Express gratitude 									
LEARNING READINESS	WEEK 1	WEEK 2	WEEK 3	WEEK 4	WEEK 5	WEEK 6	WEEK 7	WEEK 8	WEEK 9
Read at home 									
Manage screen time 									
Eat healthy dinner with the family 									
Get a healthy amount of sleep each night 									
Get at least one hour of exercise each day 									

Parent and Community Involvement Support Children and School Success: Avondale West Elementary School

The following example at the Avondale West Elementary School showcases how concerted efforts to encourage family-supported literacy and to build social capital through community involvement make a difference in student success. PTA National Standards exemplified in this example include: Standard 3) supporting student success and Standard 6) collaborating with community.

At Avondale West Elementary School in the Topeka Public Schools USD 501, they have found ways to “Bring Books Alive for Students and Families,” the theme of a major parent involvement initiative during the 2008/09 school year that has focused on ways that families can support children’s literacy development. According to Scott Henson, principal of the school, the goal of this initiative is to share with parents how they can support their children’s reading achievement.

He believes this effort, which is built on the philosophy underlying the Comer School Development Program that the district embarked on nearly twenty years ago, has impacted students and families alike. The Comer Process, designed by James P. Comer at Yale, provides a structure as well as a process for mobilizing adults to support students’ learning and overall development.

This past fall Avondale West ES invited Kansas City children’s author, Lisa Campbell Ernst, who wrote *When Bluebell Sang* and several other books, for an all-day presentation. She met with children throughout the day and shared with them how she came to write her books and the characters who inspired her stories. And then, as part of the school’s regularly scheduled “Family Reading Night” activities, she met with up to 40 parents to inform them about the importance of reading, and to encourage them to read with their children. This was so successful, the school now has plans to include other authors and story tellers throughout the year.

This is only one of many ways that Avondale West ES is trying to impress on parents the importance of supporting, and being involved in, their children’s learning. The school has been using DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Literacy Skills) to track students’ reading achievement and has been

Demographic Statistics for Avondale West ES (USD 501)

Total number of Students	198
Economically Disadvantaged	58.49%
African American	25.28%
Hispanic	9.81%
White	52.45%
Other	12.45%

Reading – Proficient and Above: 79.1% of all students; 74.6% free and reduced lunch students

Math – Proficient and Above: 79.1% of all students; 74.6% free and reduced lunch students

sharing DIBELS assessment results with parents so that they will know in which areas they can better assist their children’s literacy development. Mr. Henson shared that this information is given to parents during Parent-Teacher conferences (more than 90% attend regularly), during the SIT (School Improvement Team) process, and as part of the school’s KSDE MTSS (Multiple Tiered Support System) plans.

He added that they also continue to share with parents many literacy resources developed by the US Department of Education (which are available through the KPIRC office or online at www.edpubs.org), and give parents additional ideas on ways to read to, and listen to their children read. To encourage parent involvement continuously throughout the summer, the school has developed a “Summer Reading Fun” activity packet that includes two purchased books appropriate for the child’s reading level, notes to parents and student on the importance of reading, a reading log, and various independent reading activities that parents and children can do together.

In addition to these literacy-related activities, parent involvement has flourished through their local parent teacher organization (PTO). One of these activities is a PTO supported, 20-page monthly school newsletter of which 90% of the

articles are written by the children themselves. Mr. Henson reports that parents eagerly look forward to receiving and reading the newsletter! Another popular activity is the PTO sponsored Bingo night where prizes include books for all ages of children. He commented that they give away “tons of books” at this very popular annual event.

Avondale West ES has also developed very close connections to the entire community with the Neighborhood Improvement Association actually holding their monthly meetings at the school. This is an excellent opportunity to update the community on the school and to invite community members to participate in the various school activities. This past year, the school’s Drama Club presented a play “Santa Goes Green” that was well attended and appreciated by community members, especially those involved in the Neighborhood Association’s “Keep America Beautiful” initiative.

This ongoing relationship with the community has created much social capital, which has tremendously benefitted the school. Examples of these benefits include community partners who volunteer their time to support children’s learning at the school. One such partnership is with the local Rotary Club. For the past ten years between 30 and 50 members have participated on a regular basis in a variety of activities at the school including:

- Mighty Mentors – where volunteers come to theular basis and read to the children;
- LunchBunch – where 12 volunteers, one for each classroom, come to the school to eat lunch with one child from each of the classrooms; and
- PenPals – where volunteers either write letters or email the children on a regular basis.

Another exciting and very worthwhile partnership is with Washburn University. Students from Washburn provide an after-school program for nearly half of Avondale West ES students at no cost to parents. This two hour per day, Monday through Friday program provides children with physical activities, nutritional snacks (funded through the USDA hot lunch program), assistance with homework and academics, and exposure and involvement in the arts.

Connecting with parents and community partners certainly has had a positive impact on Avondale West ES children and is a wonderful example of

how, even in an urban area, schools can be a hub for worthwhile and exciting community and parent involvement.

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Parent Involvement at the Junior and Senior High Level Has Big Dividends in Dighton

The following example at the Junior and Senior High School in Dighton illustrates that parents can still be an integral part of their children's schooling experience. PTA National Standards impacting parent involvement in this example include: Standard 1) welcoming all families in the school community; Standard 3) supporting student success; Standard 4) speaking up for every child; and Standard 6) collaborating with community.

While common practice in many schools is that parent involvement drops off dramatically after elementary school, the Dighton USD 482 in western Kansas proves otherwise. According to Casey Cloninger, principal of Dighton Junior and Senior HS, parents are an integral part of the school and continue to be actively involved. He attributes this to two factors: 1) they are a small school (with a little over 100 students at the 7th through 12th grade level); and, 2) even though the community is small with 1800 population, the community is extremely supportive. But another factor, evident from this example, is that the principal and staff value parent and community involvement and continue to look for opportunities for them to be actively involved.

One of the ways they initially welcome parents into the school is through the 7th and 9th grade orientation that is conducted at the beginning of the school year. Since this is a transition time for students, moving into the middle and high school levels, Mr. Cloninger believes it is important that parents and students alike learn what to expect, meet and interact with the principal and the staff, and have an opportunity to tour the building, which is lead by 10th, 11th, and 12th grade Student Council members. He also attributes their success with parent involvement to keeping parents informed of student grades, announcements about upcoming events, and other important school information via Power School, an online information system. Between 80 and 85% of the parents access the system, either at home or at work. At the beginning of the school year each parent receives a password and an informational packet on how to activate their account and start receiving information. Mr. Cloninger says that parents monitor this closely and if they have any questions, they can communicate easily with teachers via email, telephone, or through scheduled personal visits.

Demographic Statistics for Dighton Junior and Senior High School (USD 482)

Total number of Students	106
Economically Disadvantaged	39.62%
White	93.34%
Other	3.77%

Reading – Proficient and Above: 91.3% of all students; NA – free & reduced

Math – Proficient and Above: 84.8% of all students; NA – free & reduced

He believes in and endorses an “open door policy,” so that all parents can feel welcome at the school and communicate with him anytime and/or with teachers before and after school, or during their prep times. He feels it is very important to keep these lines of communication open with parents at all times.

Parents have several other opportunities to learn more about Dighton and Kansas state standards via course syllabi, received from their children's teachers. From the syllabi they learn more about course and student expectations. Through KSDE resources, such as the *Just for Parents* resource, parents find the expectations for each grade level explicitly spelled out. Once school begins, parents of students participating in athletics (about 50% of the student population) receive weekly student “eligibility reports” so parents can monitor their student's academic performance.

Up to 80% of the parents regularly participate in the two-day fall Parent-Teacher conferences. While attendance at spring conferences is not as high, Mr. Cloninger feels that because parents can communicate with teachers on a regular basis throughout the school year, the need may not be as great in the spring. Consequently, they are moving to an “appointment only” conference schedule that will be implemented in the spring.

Parents are also actively involved in the SIT (School Improvement Team) process and work together with teachers in generating strategies to address student issues and concerns, especially as these relate to the development of special education IEPs and 504 plans. This involvement exemplifies how Dighton encourages parental participation in the multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) process that Kansas is implementing in conjunction with the Response to Intervention federal initiative.

Parents are also involved and have a voice on the Dighton JR & SR High School Site Council, which is made up of eight members, including parents and community members, and meets once every three months during the school year. These meetings provide an opportunity to share information about the status of the school concerning NCLB requirements, e.g., the Building Level Report Card and student ACT scores. The Site Council also provides a forum for parents and the community to address specific issues and concerns that arise from time to time, such as how to generate more support for economically disadvantaged families and their children who wish to participate in athletic and extra-curricular activities, but don't have the means.

Mr. Cloninger also reports that the community has taken an active role in supporting and participating in school events. He is invited several times a year to City Council meetings to share information about the school. In conjunction with a new community initiative, "Safe For Your Kids to Walk Home," area businesses and the school have developed a collaborative website that features information about the school district. The community is generous with the school in monetarily supporting many activities such as new band uniforms and warm-up jerseys for the basketball team, as well as supporting the Scholar's Bowl, Forensic meets, and sponsorship of student attendance at area leadership conferences. Local community groups, such as the Lion's Club, also provide refreshments at football and basketball events.

To reciprocate this feeling of good will toward the school from the community, Mr. Cloninger has initiated a new annual "Community Day" at the school. With input from businesses and community members as to their needs, students are now spending one day in the spring giving back to the community by addressing these needs through

community service. It is this ongoing spirit of collaboration between parents, the community, and the school that contributes to the high degree of academic success that the Dighton JR and SR High School students are continually achieving.

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Celebrating Learning with the Franklin Fireballs: How Quality Parent Involvement Leads to Student Success at Franklin Elementary School

The following example of parent involvement in the Franklin Elementary School confirms the research that shows a positive correlation between parent involvement and student academic success. The following PTA National Standards supporting parent involvement are showcased: Standard 1) welcoming all families into the school community; Standard 2) communicating effectively; Standard 5) sharing power; and Standard 6) collaborating with community.

Franklin Elementary School, in Geary County Schools, USD 475 is a stellar example of how parent involvement fosters student success and where students live up to their new logo, the “Franklin Fireballs!”

Phyllis Gibson, principal at Franklin ES, reports that teachers and staff participated in cultural sensitivity training that has impacted how everyone at the school interacts and works with Franklin’s diverse student body and their families.

Families are welcomed into the school through home visits, which are conducted prior to the beginning of each new school year. Although the visits are primarily to families of children in the primary grades, all ES teachers and classified staff participate in this activity because children interact with all staff and teachers on a daily basis, not only the classroom teacher. Teacher and staff teams contact five to seven families each. If a family speaks Spanish, interpreters go along with the team. Teachers and staff appreciate the opportunity to meet children and their families prior to the school year. Ms. Gibson reports that the families “think it’s the neatest thing.”

Once they have established relationships with school personnel, parents are more apt to participate in the many other parent involve- events that are offered throughout the year at Franklin. Because parents have already met their children’s teachers during the home visits and have become familiar with the school during orientation, “Back to School Night” is an opportunity for the children to show their parents around their classroom and for parents to get to know each other, especially when this evening is combined with an ice cream social, as it was this past year. Other popular and well-

attended parent involvement activities include

Demographic Statistics for Franklin ES (USD 475)	
Total number of Students	197
Economically Disadvantaged	70.56%
African American	19.80%
Hispanic	11.17%
White	51.78%
Other	17.26%
Reading – Proficient and Above: 92.6% of all students; 94.6% of free and reduced lunch students	
Math – Proficient and Above: 95.1% of all students; 96.4% of free and reduced lunch students	

reading nights, where parents receive guidelines and strategies on how to read to their children 20 minutes each night.

Franklin ES parents are “kept in the loop” through various means of communication. The principal shares information about upcoming events and school accomplishments in the monthly newsletter. Newsletters are also sent home by individual classroom teachers. The principal has made it her personal goal to make up to two telephone contacts with each family every week to inform them about upcoming events and share with them interactions or conversations she has with their children. The school also regularly distributes to parents KPIRC parent involvement resources on a variety of topics, which are appreciated for the “parent friendly language and format.”

Parents also receive information on state standards and assessment results at the fall parent-teacher conferences. Time is taken to explain to parents where their student is in relation to state, as well as district curricular standards. Teachers take the time to explain to parents the quarterly expectations for their children and ways to make sure that each child progresses and stays on track.

The School-Parent Compact has become a useful document, rather than merely a state and federal requirement under the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)*. This past year teachers explained the purpose of the Compact to the children prior to having them sign it and they explained the Compact to their parents, who also signed it. Ms. Gibson believes that with student and parent ownership of the Compact, it will now become an even more valuable document, one that will be used to support students' learning. Parents'

suggestions to send home copies of the School-Parent Compact have also been implemented, so that the Compact is now a constant reminder of the necessity for parents to be continually involved in supporting children's learning.

The school regularly shares power with the parents through their yearly involvement in reviewing and revising the Title I Parent Involvement Policy. At the district level, power is shared with parents through a "Patron's Committee" that is made up of two representative parents from each building in the district. This committee, spearheaded by the District Administrator, meets three times a year to address questions and suggestions submitted by parents throughout the district. These parents, in turn, report the outcomes of these meetings back to their individual buildings. Parents appreciate this opportunity to feel like their voice really does count in school and district-wide decision making processes.

Franklin ES has formed valuable school partnerships with many community members and area businesses. One special partnership is with McDonalds, which hosts a free monthly luncheon to recognize and honor the 11 to 12 ES students (one from each classroom), who have been chosen as the "Outstanding Citizen of the Month." This 17 year tradition is also a great way for the community at large to witness and recognize students' positive behaviors and accomplishments.

All these examples of parent and community involvement contribute to students' high achievement rates, as well as creating a school that feels more like a family than just a school. These accomplishments are reflected in the fact that staff turn-over is very low with no new teachers hired these past four years and 100% parent involvement

this past year in parent-teacher conferences. Learning is fun and meaningful and every quarter Franklin ES takes time to "celebrate learning," a special opportunity for children, staff, and parents to engage in celebratory activities that include field trips to interesting places and interacting with other adults in the community.

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Engaging Migrant Parents Through A Parent Teacher Resource Center in the Great Bend USD

This is an example of how the Great Bend USD has met the unique needs of its large migrant and Hispanic population of parents through establishing multiple programs and a Parent Teacher Resource Center. PTA National Standards addressed in this case study include: Standard 1) welcoming all families into the school community; Standard 2) communicating effectively; and Standard 3) supporting student success.

Rosalia Sandoval, a Parent Teacher Resource Center (PTRC) Manager and Migrant Parent Advisory Council (MPAC) Coordinator working with migrant and Hispanic parents in the Great Bend USD reports that the school district provides parents with many resources and opportunities to be involved. Given the large numbers of Hispanic families in the Great Bend USD, she says there is a need to address Hispanic parents' special interest and concerns. For example, Riley, one of five elementary schools, has an Hispanic student population of 86.9%. An effective strategy the district has implemented, that is especially appreciated by many of these families, is the Parent Teacher Resource Center located at the Washington Early Learning Center in the district.

The PTRC is federally funded through Migrant and Title I program funds and is open throughout the entire year. The PTRC is a gathering place where migrant and Hispanic parents can work together on a variety of school projects and where they can feel like they are making a contribution to their children's education. The PTRC also holds regular MPAC meetings where parents learn how they can more effectively support their children's academic and personal success.

At the first MPAC meeting of the year, parents are introduced to each other and asked specifically what kinds of programs and information they desire to address throughout the year. Ms. Sandoval reports that parents have requested information around a variety of topics such as reading to your children, proper health care, making puppets at home, encouraging physical activities and exercise for your children, etc. She generally identifies speakers who can address many of these issues. Information is either presented in, or translated into Spanish.

Demographic Statistics for Great Bend (USD 428)

Total number of Students	3132
Economically Disadvantaged	57.5%
African American	2.04%
Hispanic	27.94%
White	66.48%
Other	3.54%
Reading – Proficient and Above: 89.0% of all students; 83.6% of free and reduced lunch students; 78.0% of ELL (79.6% Hispanic)	
Math – Proficient and Above: 86.3% of all students; 80.8% of free and reduced lunch students, 76.9% of ELL (78.3% Hispanic)	

These meetings also provide an opportunity for MPAC staff to share information and teach parents about Title I and mandates under the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*. Kansas Parent Information Resource Center staff have been involved in presenting this information to families.

The MPAC also provides an eight-week parent training program called “*Passport to Success*,” which consists of eight separate modules intended to help all students in all grades achieve academically. These modules include:

- Learning Begins in the Home
- Becoming a Learning Architect
- Study Skills
- Homework and Learning Expeditors
- Note Taking Skills
- Preparing for Tests
- Memory and Thinking Skills
- Reading Skills

Twenty-five to 35 parents regularly attend the MPAC program and then implement at home with their children the concepts that they have learned from participating in this program.

Another strategy used to communicate information to parents is a monthly bilingual newsletter sent out through the PTRC. The newsletter provides additional parent involvement suggestions and

informs parents about upcoming meetings and events. Teachers, also find the newsletter very helpful and often reproduce many of the articles. A *Parent & Child Activity Calendar* is included, which provides day-to-day strategies parents can use to continue supporting their children's success throughout the entire year, especially to promote continued learning during the summer months. The newsletter and calendars may be viewed at www.usd428.net. An *Everyday TLC* flyer and the *Ser Padres Magazine* are also distributed. PTRC also houses a Spanish & Bilingual Library with over 2,000 toddler, children, and adult titles.

Ms. Sandoval reports that the PTRC has had great success in enabling many parents to get more involved in their children's learning, as well as in their children's schools. She also adds that because of the special programs offered through the PTRC, parents now have a deeper understanding of their rights as parents and are becoming more involved in their children's schooling experience. Furthermore, the district has made steady gains in reading and math test scores, which can be attributed to the work of the PTRC that supports greater parent participation.

Even with these success stories, there are always challenges in reaching out to, and trying to involve all parents. However, the Parent Teacher Resource Center is a good start toward addressing challenges with this special population of parents.

Additional resources recommended by USD 428 include:

- The Parent-Institute at www.parent-institute.com/educator/products/newsletters/pmdfamily.php has newsletters, activity calendars and other products in both Spanish and English for purchase.
- Everyday TLC at www.everydaytlc.com/tlcs-panish.htm has monthly articles in Spanish that are free.
- *Ser Padres Magazine* at Ser Padres, P.O. Box 384, Congers, NY 10920, fax 845 267-3478 has a Spanish parenting magazine that is provided free in quantities of 50 to professional affiliations.

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A Successful Migrant Parent Advisory Council/Site Council at Hugoton Elementary School

The following example of parent involvement in the Hugoton Elementary School exemplifies several of the PTA National Standards for parent/Family Involvement programs: specifically Standard 1) welcoming all families in the school community; Standard 3) supporting student success; and Standard 4) speaking up for every child.

The Migrant Parent Advisory Council (MPAC) in the Hugoton Elementary School consists of an average 20 to 30 parents who have formal meetings at least five times during the school year, on the 2nd Monday of October, November, February, March, and April to make decisions and have input into meeting the needs of migrant children and their families. While the MPAC is primarily made up of Hispanic families, it also includes German Mennonite parents.

The 35 migrant families in the Hugoton community 50% are Hispanic families and 50% are German Mennonite families, who relocated to Mexico from Canada and have since migrated north to the United States. Among these families there are 101 children. Tiffany Boxum, Principal at the ES commented that several German Mennonite fathers have consistently attended meetings this past year and were especially interested in how schools in the United States operated and the system of education being used for their children.

At the first MPAC meeting in the fall of the school year, officers including the president and are selected to oversee MPAC meetings. Hugoton ES uses a variety of strategies to encourage attendance at these, and other meetings, including issuing a formal invitation to all migrant families district wide, having parents sign-up to participate during enrollment week, telephone calls, sending post card reminders about upcoming meetings, and distributing posters written in Spanish to area retail and other establishments frequented by these families.

A meal is provided for each meeting, as well as child care, to ensure greater participation. The school also offers ESL classes for families and parents, which in turn enables more families to feel more comfortable in the school setting and, thus, participate in MPAC and assume leadership roles in a variety of venues.

Demographic Statistics for Hugoton (USD 210)

Total number of Students	574
Economically Disadvantaged	60.10%
Hispanic	45.30%
White	54.01%
Other	.70%
Reading – Proficient and Above: 93.5% of all students; 92.3% of free and reduced lunch students	
Math – Proficient and Above: 93.5% of all students; 91.0% of free and reduced lunch students	

Topics of discussion at these meetings generally include such things as: information about Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), other specifics about ESEA, and testing in the district.

The school sponsors several evening sessions where parents have the opportunity to come to the school with their children to take practice tests together, which is a way to increase parents' comfort level with district testing and assessment. These meetings also provide an opportunity for parents to learn strategies on how to help their children to be more successful academically.

A case in point is that the previous year the elementary school did not make AYP in reading. After an analysis of test score data, teachers realized that students were weak in understanding the concept of prefixes and suffixes. Given the fact that the Spanish language does not include these parts of language, parents were then taught numerous strategies and ideas on how they could help their children at home to understand the concept of prefixes and suffixes. The effort of the school in working with the parents paid off, because the subsequent year, the school was successful in making AYP, which many felt was attributable to parent involvement in helping children to learn at home.

A popular topic of discussion this past year has been the results of the Kansas Communities That Care survey, where parents learned about the kinds of negative behaviors that children and youth sometimes participated in. Consequently parents had many questions about how the school could offer more extra-curricular activities for children as alternatives to engaging in these negative behaviors.

This involvement has carried over into other grades as well, with parents at the HS level taking an active role in helping to design an annual Cinco De Mayo celebration in the district. Future plans, generated by parents, include the development of a Latino Club for older Hispanic students, which parents feel will provide a good alternative for extra-curricular activities and will help their children to reach their full potential.

The success of the Hispanic Parent Migrant Advisory Council is attributed to several things:

1. The school expends much time and energy inviting and encouraging parent involvement.
2. The school provides a welcoming environment in offering parents food and child care while they are at the school.
3. Parents are consistently provided with the kind of information and resources they require, such as the KPIRC resource, *ABC Book of Educational Terms*, translated into Spanish. This resource assists families in better understanding educational jargon as well as the educational system in this country.

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Parent Involvement in Supporting Student Success at Moonlight Elementary School

The following example of parent involvement at Moonlight Elementary School in the Gardner Edgerton USD 231 demonstrates how multiple strategies equate to quality parent involvement. PTA National Standards supporting parent involvement in this example include: Standard 1) welcoming all families into the school community; Standard 2) communicating effectively; and especially Standard 3) supporting student success.

Karla Reed, Gardner Edgerton District Reading Specialist attributes their high success with student achievement in reading and math at Moonlight ES to the multiple opportunities that are provided for parent involvement and participation. She says that even prior to the school year beginning, all teachers send out a post card to each student with the teacher’s picture. The purpose of this mailing is for teachers to share a little of themselves with their future students and to let the students know that they “can’t wait to meet them and their parents.” Another communication sent to parents includes a letter welcoming them and their children to the school, along with a ticket indicating that the child will receive a special prize when they bring the ticket back to school.

The “open door” policy at the school, which invites them to visit anytime, is also especially welcoming to all parents. In addition, there are numerous formal events planned for parent involvement throughout the entire year. One of these activities is the annual “open house,” held about three weeks into the school year, where parents learn about the curriculum and standards.

Another popular and well-attended event is family literacy night; each grade level sponsors one family literacy night per year. These events, which offer child care and numerous incentives from area businesses to encourage parent participation, are generally theme-based, such as a recent “pasta” literacy night, complete with chef hats and red and white checkered table cloths.

At these events parents learn specific strategies they can do with their children to support their literacy development at home, such as sharing with parents the differences between expository and fictional text, and then giving examples of what kinds of questions they can ask their children to increase comprehension of what they are

Demographic Statistics for Moonlight ES (USD 231)

Total number of Students	446
Economically Disadvantaged	34.53%
African American	2.91%
Hispanic	6.05%
White	82.74%
Other	8.30%

Reading – Proficient and Above: 97.9% of all students; 98.1% of free and reduced lunch students

Math – Proficient and Above: 98.6% of all students; 98.1% of free and reduced lunch students

reading. Parents are also taught about DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Literacy Skills) and how children are regularly assessed to determine individual reading levels. In addition to learning what the school is doing for children who struggle with reading, parents are given specific strategies and packets of resources to let them know what they can do at home to assist their child’s literacy development.

While all families are invited to attend these evenings, families of children with particular reading difficulties are targeted through personal invitations. Due to concerns about some families not attending these events, the school makes every effort to involve as many families as possible by sponsoring a “literacy night bus,” where families get to ride the bus to and from these literacy events.

Families are also provided many resources, such as the *School Home Links Kit* and the *Reading Activity Packets*, which the KPIRC has made available to schools throughout Kansas to support parent involvement in literacy-related activities. Teachers primarily use *School-Home Links* with Title I students, sending home activity sheets on Monday. When students return the activity sheet by the end of the week, they receive a sticker on their progress chart as an incentive to return the sheets.

The *Reading Activity Packets*, which provide numerous literacy-related activities that parents can do at home with their children, are focused on the five big ideas of reading – phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension, as defined by the National Reading Panel. Teachers have found these activities very useful, especially with their Response to Intervention (RtI) school initiatives and MTSS tiered interventions.

Other opportunities for parent involvement include math nights, three family fun nights a year, and then, regularly scheduled PTO meetings. These events provide opportunities to share information about the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, testing, and the value and impact of parent involvement on children’s learning.

The school communicates regularly with parents through promotion of these events; the school’s newsletter, which is sent and available on-line; and, through telephone messages that all parents receive. And, for parents of Hispanic children, all the information sent home is translated into Spanish. Moonlight ES staff and the principal believe that to have effective parent involvement the school must use multiple means to make sure that parents are both informed and aware of ways they can make a difference in their children’s academic and personal success.

Besides involving families in supporting children’s learning at home, Moonlight ES also actively involves parents in the school’s Site Council and in the School Improvement Team (SIT) process. While they report their goal is to improve parent involvement by developing the Title I parent involvement policy, they feel that they are at least making good inroads toward this goal, because many Title I parents are willing to be involved on a regular basis.

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A Parent Resource Room as an Impetus for Parent Involvement: Nelson Elementary School

The following example of parent involvement in the Nelson Elementary School in the Haysville USD 261 demonstrates how establishing a Parent Resource Center at the school impacted positive parent involvement. PTA National Standards supporting parent involvement in this example include: Standard 3) supporting student success and Standard 6) collaborating with community.

Jackie Waters, Vice President of Advocacy for the KS PTA and local PTA advocacy chair at Nelson Elementary School in Haysville USD 261 in south central Kansas shares that parent involvement is alive and well at her school with more than 150 families actively participating in PTA and parent involvement activities. She attributes the success they are having with parent involvement to two things.

The first is the principal at Nelson Elementary, who consistently models a positive attitude toward parents and welcomes and supports their involvement in the school.

The second is the fact that in 2002 the school allocated space for a Parent Resource Center, which she says came about from questions that parents had concerning how they could more effectively help their children with learning at home. To address these concerns, the school created a Center where parents could access resources and information from the PTA and the Kansas Parent Information Resource Center and learn more about community services.

Ms. Waters also attributes much of the success of the Resource Center to the varied resources that the KPIRC has been able to provide, which includes 300 US Department of Education school kits that were distributed to families in the district. In addition to these resources, she also commented that they appreciate the resources available to them from the KPIRC website, which parents find easy to navigate. She says that now, when parents have questions about how they can specifically help their children in certain subject areas, the teachers take the parents to the Resource Center where they pull information and present it to the parents.

Demographic Statistics for Nelson ES (USD 261)

Total number of Students	394
Economically Disadvantaged	42.89%
African American	2.79%
Hispanic	5.84%
White	87.31%
Other	4.06%

Reading – Proficient and Above: 80.2% of all students; 84.8% of free and reduced lunch students

Math – Proficient and Above: 91.9% of all students; 92.4% of free and reduced lunch students

In addition to the Resource Center, parent involvement at Nelson takes on many other forms. The Nelson ES PTA meets every other month with 20 to 40 parents attending on a regular basis. The Executive Committee meets monthly. At the beginning of the school year Nelson Elementary promotes “3 for Me” – asking parents to donate three hours of time during the year, to which 60% of the parents sign up to volunteer on a regular basis. Parents also participate in the annual Book Fair in October and February, an annual Family Fun Night in April, and the School Carnival in May. Throughout the year, there are periodic “Read-A-Thons” where parents can participate with their children. An extra special parent involvement event is the annual “Art in the Park,” in January when the school’s gymnasium is transformed into a park-like setting in the middle of winter with benches and plants and 15-20 exhibitors.

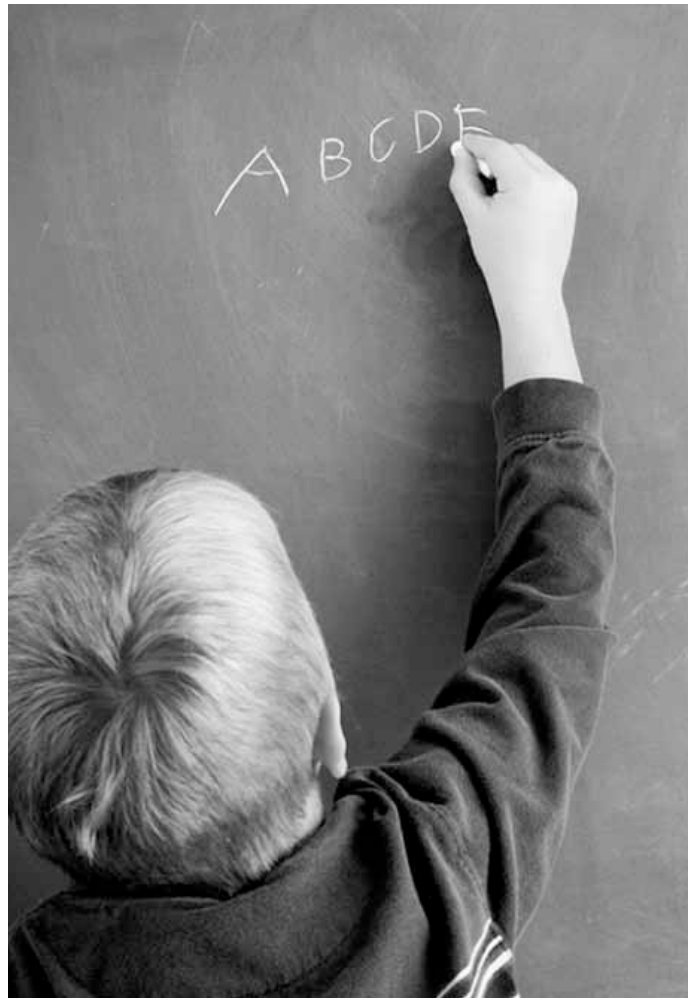
Parent are also welcomed to the school on a regular basis to meet with their children over the lunch hour. And they actively volunteer in classrooms to listen to children read and to assist teachers in a variety of miscellaneous tasks. Parents believe that if teachers have to take time to do these activities they are taking quality time away from teaching, so parents willingly and gladly volunteer to do those tasks.

In addition to parents, many community members, such as Big Sisters and City Council members, are also encouraged and welcomed to volunteer at the school as tutors and mentors to the students. They don't have trouble finding volunteers for the School Site Council, either, which is made up of community members, parents, the principal, teachers, local business owners, grandparents, and even the City Commissioner.

All these activities, it is believed, have had a tremendously positive impact on students' grades and behaviors, which are reflected in their academic success at the school.

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Home Visits the Key to Parent Involvement at Obee Elementary School

The following example exemplifies how a practice focused on home visits at the Obee Elementary School in the Buhler USD 313 has fostered close relationships between families, children, and teachers and has been the impetus for student academic success. PTA National Standards supporting parent involvement in this example include: Standard 1) welcoming all families into the school community; Standard 2) communicating effectively; Standard 3) supporting student success; and 6) collaborating with community.

A major key to success with parent involvement at Obee Elementary School in the Buhler USD, according to Letitia Petitjean, a kindergarten teacher involved with ESL and other programs in the district, is home visits. The impetus for doing these visits was the fact that many parents, who had negative experiences as children, sometimes did not feel comfortable coming to the school to meet with their children’s teachers. On the other hand, through home visits the teacher actually goes out to meet the parent. Obee staff found that home visits were a true “morale” builder for their parents and children’s families.

The home visits, which last about thirty minutes each, generally occur either the week-end before school begins or during the first day of school. Parents have an opportunity to sign up and if they don’t feel comfortable meeting the teachers at their home, an alternative setting can be selected. There is much fanfare associated with this activity – with signs, balloons, and even parades, which builds a lot of enthusiasm with everyone for this now traditional and yearly event.

The home visits provide an opportunity for the teachers to meet the child’s family, including extended family, and to learn about the child’s interests and to set goals for the next school year. During the home visits, teachers are able to share with families tips, resources, and information concerning what they can do at home to support their children’s learning. And parents have opportunities to ask teachers questions about what their child can expect during the coming school year.

The value of doing home visits is tremendous. According to Ms. Petitjean, home visits provide

Demographic Statistics for Obee ES (USD 313)

Total number of Students	181
Economically Disadvantaged	60.22%
African American	3.31%
Hispanic	11.60%
White	79.01%
Other	6.08%

Reading – Proficient and Above: 96% of all students; 94.1% of free and reduced lunch students

Math – Proficient and Above: 98.6% of all students; 98.% of free and reduced lunch students

an excellent opportunity for teachers to develop a relationship and create a positive bond with the child’s family, and to develop an understanding and empathy for each child. Home visits enable the “ice to be broken” with families, who then feel more welcome and less hesitant to come to the school, because now they have an established relationship with their child’s teacher.

During the home visits, teachers take a picture of the entire family, including pets. These pictures are then displayed in a “family gallery,” in the hallways throughout the entire school. Ms. Petitjean reports that parents love coming to school and viewing this gallery of family pictures, where they see themselves proudly displayed.

Because home visits have proven to be an extremely positive experience for parents at the school, all Obee teachers participate in this very worthwhile program. While the newer teachers may initially be a little hesitant to try home visits, Mr. Petitjean says that once they have experienced them and see the value, they come to appreciate the opportunity to engage in this activity.

Prior to the home visits, the annual “Back to School Night” was not well attended. But now, because parents have met the teachers prior to this event, many parents participate in “Back to School Night,” which has shifted from the traditional “meet and

greet” activity to an event engaging parents in discussions about curriculum and what individual classrooms will be doing that school year. Because many grandparents at the school are also involved in parenting their grandchildren, this evening is very worthwhile in helping them to understand what is happening in the school.

In addition to home visits and “Back to School Night”, Obee ES also sponsors many other activities for parent involvement. During the school year three to four family nights are held that focus on either on math or reading. One of the more popular family nights is “Author’s Night” where parents and children together write a book, which the children then read to their parents and autograph. All persons participating in this event receive incentives as well.

Students are also involved in parent-teacher conferences with student-led conferences in some of the school’s upper grades. The conferences provide an opportunity to revisit student goals that were established during the home visits. Parents also have an opportunity to fill out a survey selecting the areas of parent involvement on which they prefer the school to focus during the school year.

Obee ES also has a rather unique partnership with the local Dillon’s grocery store. Dillons provides food for family events at the school and annually awards four \$250.00 scholarships to children. To be eligible for this scholarship, parents and children work together on a family project that they present at a schoolwide assembly which is then judged by a panel of community members. While being an excellent opportunity for family involvement, parents see this as a very worthwhile activity and an impetus for starting to save for their children’s education beyond school.

All these efforts with parent and community involvement certainly contribute to the high degree of academic success experienced by all children in the Obee ES.

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Offering Many Opportunities for Parent Involvement Pays Off in Big Ways: Phillipsburg Elementary School

The following example of parent involvement in the Phillipsburg Elementary School demonstrates how seemingly simple ways to involve parents have big dividends. PTA National Standards impacting parent involvement in this example include: Standard 1) welcoming all families in the school community; Standard 2) communicating effectively; and Standard 6) collaborating with community.

While the principal, Mike Gower, at Phillipsburg Elementary School, located in a small rural community in north central Kansas is modest about the parent involvement efforts they are doing at his school, the truth of the matter is that they are having great success in involving many parents, and their test scores show it! They have so many parents who want to be involved, that he says they almost need to be selective. He believes that parents are so willing to be involved because of the “open-door policy” they practice at the school that welcomes parents from all socio-economic levels. Consequently, all parents feel very comfortable being involved at the school and want to make a contribution.

The trick to parent involvement at this school is giving parents many opportunities to become involved and developing a personal relationship with them, which the principal says is easy because of the size of the school. He uses every opportunity to interact with the parents, such as when the final bell rings for the day – you’ll find him outside greeting and mingling with parents who are at the school to pick up their child. Another key to involvement is sharing information with parents in numerous ways. At Phillipsburg Elementary School these include monthly newsletters, a school website, and sending communication home on a regular basis.

Opportunities for parents to become involved include the annual Scholastic Book Fair offered in the fall in conjunction with the school’s Open House. The Book Fair is actually a recruiting tool to solicit parent involvement and to get a feel for which parents show a real interest in education. Another popular event is the Body Walk – which promotes physical education, health and wellness activities and more parent involvement. Literacy nights, held concurrently with Title I program events, have been popular. Because they use these events as

Demographic Statistics for Phillipsburg ES (USD 325)

Total number of Students	254
Economically Disadvantaged	46.46%
African American	5.51%
Hispanic	2.76%
White	90.55%
Other	1.18%

Reading – Proficient and Above: 98.7% of all students; 100% of free and reduced lunch students

Math – Proficient and Above: 96.2% of all students; 100% of free and reduced lunch students

opportunities for the children to proudly display examples of the skills they have learned in school, parent attendance is generally very high. Parents also actively volunteer in the library and in the classrooms, serving as teacher aides and helping with clerical duties. Parents, who are not able to be directly involved at school often volunteer to provide child care to those parents who are able to be involved at the school.

Another key to quality parent involvement, the principal believes, is just taking the time to ask parents to be involved. And more importantly, reaching out to parents who may have perceived the school in the past as the “enemy.” By taking the time to personally communicate with these parents and asking for their assistance at the school, a major hurdle is crossed and parents, even the most hesitant ones, feel like they are making a worthwhile contribution – which they are! While the principal says that parents won’t necessarily seek you out, they most generally always come through if you only take the time to ask them for their help, and take the necessary time to establish rapport and a good relationship with them.

Affirming the principal’s belief about establishing positive relationships with parents, teachers are proactive in making sure that their initial contact with

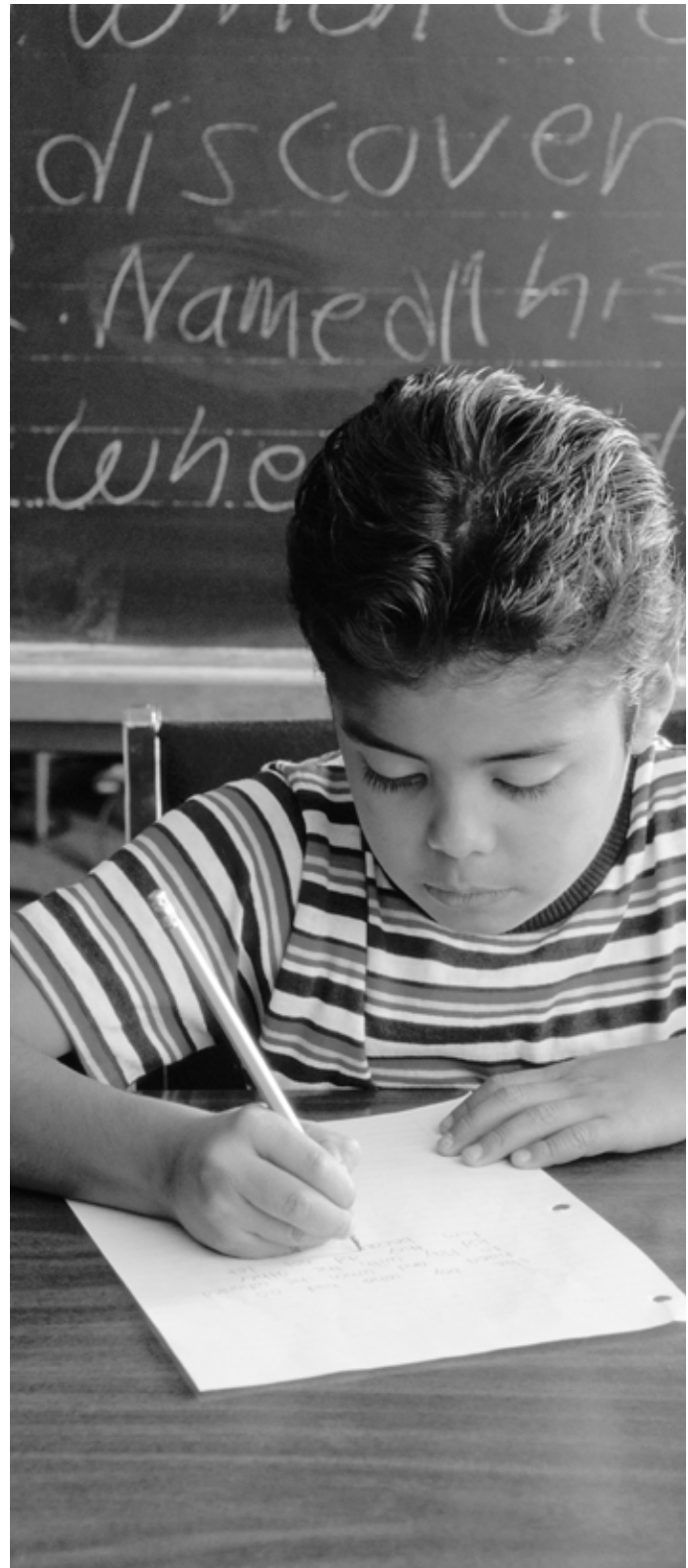
parents is a positive experience, as well. Teachers at Phillipsburg Elementary accomplish these contacts in numerous ways: face-to-face meetings, by telephone or email, at the annual open house, or via letters sent home to the parents. Some of the teachers even do home visits with every child prior to the beginning of the school year. If parents prefer not to meet at their homes, a neutral place is selected to host this meeting. The 1st grade teacher, an advocate for home visits, believes that this effort pays huge dividends down the road.” Teachers use all these opportunities to share with parents many ideas on how they can help their children to become successful learners.

All these efforts are evidently paying off as the turnout rate for Parent Teacher conferences is 98% on average. And, those parents who are “no-shows” will receive follow-up communication from both teachers and the principal.

Even though the school and community are small and rural, Phillipsburg Elementary School has found effective ways to partner with the community. The local grocery store helps provide badly needed resources with a “save the receipts” campaign. The three banks in town also have a “piece of the action” in purchasing books and encyclopedias for classrooms and promotion of school activities. They firmly believe that every family and every organization, has the ability to make a positive contribution to children’s success at the school. But most importantly they put their beliefs into practice!

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Creating a Sense of Family and Culture of Community at Prairie Elementary School

The following example shows how a new school builds a culture supporting parent involvement and creates a sense of community. PTA National Standards highlighted include: Standard 1) welcoming all families into the school community; Standard 3) supporting student success; and 6) collaborating with community.

Prairie Elementary School in the Haysville USD 261 is a unique school with a unique staff. It was created by combining students from five other elementary schools in the district, so the 2008/09 school year is only the second year the school has existed. According to Dr. Marcy Aycock, principal of the school, Prairie ES is the largest elementary school in the district and has the highest percentage of low income families. Despite these challenges, the school has experienced much success by creating a culture that supports and values parent involvement.

Because all of the families had children in other schools in the district, Dr. Aycock said that it was critical for families, children and parents alike to really “feel like the school was theirs” and to immediately identify with the school. To create that sense of family, the staff initiated many activities and opportunities for families to be involved.

During the 2008/09 school year the staff have been immersed in Prairie P.A.L.S. (Partners Accelerating Learning Success). This initiative involves holding quarterly family learning nights to promote a collaborative learning environment for all stakeholders, while building a stronger sense of “family” throughout the school. The October 2008 family night had a fall theme. The attendance was 368 families and children. In addition to a meal and resource fair, Monty Selby (a former MS principal turned song writer) worked with the children during the day, helping them to write a song, “*Reach for the Stars*,” which the children performed that evening for their parents.

In December, 312 families and children participated in the second family night, which had a Christmas theme. Families who participated, received a meal and holiday assistance information, and enjoyed the Christmas music performed by the 5th graders.

Demographic Statistics for Prairie ES (USD 261)

Total number of Students	458
Economically Disadvantaged	49.56%
African American	2.62%
Hispanic	6.77%
White	85.81%
Other	4.80%

Reading – Proficient and Above: 71.8% of all students; 67.4% of free and reduced lunch students

Math – Proficient and Above: 67.6% of all students; 60.9% of free and reduced lunch students

In addition, families had the opportunity to hear the featured speaker, Louisiana children’s author, Mike Artell, who wrote “*Three Little Cajun Pigs*.” As part of his presentation he did some illustrating and story-telling.

Two more family nights are planned; one in February and one in May, which will have a Beach Party theme focusing on activities that parents can do with children throughout the summer to promote and support literacy development. Each of these special evenings are intended to give parents ideas on ways they can help their children become more successful in school.

This new school has implemented many other strategies to make families feel welcome at, and identify with the school. Everyday, when parents come to pick up their children from school, the principal uses this as an opportunity to “meet and greet” parents and to get to know them personally. Parents are kept up-to-date on school happenings through weekly classroom newsletters and a monthly school newsletter.

Traditions have been established at this new school to support parent involvement. At the beginning of school on Halloween, parents are invited to stay and view the annual “Halloween Parade,” as the costumed children march throughout the school. Parents are also invited

to attend the weekly “Fantastic Friday Assemblies (FFA),” where children and classrooms are recognized and given awards by Dr. Aycock for fun things, such as the awards for children who lost a tooth the previous week, or the “clean sweep award” for the neatest classroom, as judged by the school janitor. The FFA is another opportunity to create a sense of family and community, and to celebrate together.

Because 27% of the students have been identified as having special needs, Dr. Aycock reported that the school did not do as well on state assessments as they would have liked. The school was new, and it was difficult the first year to place students in appropriate classrooms, where they could receive the most help. To remedy this, teachers now collaborate on a regular basis to address children’s needs, with nearly three hours of common planning time every week. This time is used to focus on how they can improve children’s achievement and test scores on the state assessments, and ways they can further involve families to support children’s learning at home.

In addition to activities creating a sense of family among parents and teachers, the children also participate in numerous activities where a sense of family is engendered. All classes have Buddy Classes. For instance, during state assessment time, the 2nd graders, who are buddies to the 5th graders, send them notes of encouragement and bring in special treats, as a way to support their success on the state assessments.

All staff and children are also divided into “Schoolwide Families,” which consist of about 12 children, from 1st through 5th grade and two adults. One day a month, they eat a sack lunch together, prepared by the school cooks, and share their thoughts and ideas. Children stay with their schoolwide family all the while they are at Prairies ES. Because this is such a special day for the children, many parents are now coming and participating as well.

Another way that the school connects with families is by housing a Communities in Schools coordinator at the school. Through this program, the school has found ways to assist families who are in need. The coordinator ensures that these families participate in the “Food for Kids” program. Thirty families, on

average, receive a backpack once a week that is filled with nutritious and shelf stable food. Also, the school works closely with local churches in the area that adopt families and provide needed resources.

Despite its status as a brand new school, Prairie ES has risen to the challenge and created a culture of community and caring, and a genuine sense of family.

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Developing School Readiness Through School–Parent Partnerships: Ruth Clark Elementary School

The following example showcases a school embarking on a journey to foster more effective early parent involvement in children’s literacy development. The PTA National Standard supporting parent involvement in this example is primarily Standard 3) supporting student success.

According to Missy Hollenbeck, principal of Ruth Clark Elementary School in Haysville USD 261, one of the major challenges at Ruth Clark ES has been how to impress upon parents, prior to their children entering kindergarten, the importance of early literacy development. Dr. Hollenbeck shared that when kindergarten children possess emergent literacy skills, they will be more adequately prepared by the time they enter 3rd grade for the kinds of literacy tasks required on the KSDE reading assessments.

Given the facts that the district has not yet supported all-day kindergarten and that a common perception of some of the incoming kindergarten students’ parents is that “learning starts once children enter kindergarten,” teachers and the school’s principal felt an urgent need to promote family-supported literacy among preschool parents through a special project called, “Connecting the Dots: A School-Parent Partnership.”

The goal of this project – helping parents to promote their children’s school readiness – focused on establishing relationships with parents whose children would be entering kindergarten the next school year. The underlying goal of this project is supported by family literacy research and statistics that show when parents spend time reading to their pre-school children and involving them in literacy-related activities, children will be nearly twice as likely as other children to show three or more skills associated with emerging literacy (1).

Demographic Statistics for Ruth Clark ES (USD 261)

Total number of Students	313
Economically Disadvantaged	45.37%
African American	5.11%
Hispanic	9.58%
White	70.93%
Other	14.38%
Reading – Proficient and Above: 95.9% of all students; 96.1% of free and reduced lunch students	
Math – Proficient and Above: 93.8% of all students; 90.9% of free and reduced lunch students	

Other research addresses four types of family processes that promote children’s literacy development:

- **Opportunities for learning** – exposure to literacy resources and active intervention;
- **Recognition of children’s efforts** – parents as encourager;
- **Interaction** – interpersonal relationships between parent and child through offering support and involvement in real literacy tasks; and
- **Modeling** – parental behaviours as literacy users and learners, themselves (2).

To implement the project, the ten “neediest” children (e.g., those lacking in literacy skills) were identified during kindergarten screening. School staff then put together a plan of action identifying ways they could proactively intervene and connect with the families of these children, so they could give them the necessary resources, skills, and strategies they could use at home to promote literacy development in their children. To implement their plan of action, the Title I teacher, both kindergarten teachers, and the principal conducted home visits prior to the beginning of the 2008/09 school year.

During the home visit, school staff shared a variety of activities with parents that they could do at home with their children to encourage learning. They also brought with them many literacy tools and resources to give parents that included items such as pencils, crayons, alphabets, books, and a packet that informed parents how the school prefers that children form their letters when printing. Their hope was that through these home visits, parents' perceptions that learning starts once children enter kindergarten would be changed, and that parents would come to realize that they can make a difference in their child's readiness for school and can actually promote early literacy development.

The plan throughout the 2008/09 school year has been to follow-up the home visits with special parent nights for the parents of the identified children with the goal of helping them with ideas and strategies on how they can continue to support their children's literacy development at home. While the school staff still face challenges in involving 100% of the identified parents in these special follow-up literacy evenings at the school, they are trying to encourage better attendance at these events through using a variety of strategies, including food, which they have found to be a great motivator!

To date, however, the principal reports that they are having a degree of success in that all the kindergarten children, except three, are on benchmark, which is pretty remarkable given the fact that there are two separate sections of kindergarten children attending daily. They use DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Literacy Skills) as a way to assess children's literacy skill development and share assessment results with parents at parent-teacher conferences. Their plan now is to give parents specific strategies they can use at home to continue supporting literacy development.

Because of the success they are experiencing with this project, the principal says that home visits, early interventions, and teaching parents how they can assist their children's learning at home and readiness for school will become the norm at Ruth Clark ES.

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Data Sources

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2. C. Nutbrown and Hannon, P. (Eds.) (1997) Teachers' use of a conceptual framework for early literacy education with parents. *Teacher Development*, Vol. 1(3), pp. 405-420.



Meeting the Challenges of Parent Involvement with Military Families: Ware Elementary School

The following example at Ware Elementary School shows how one school rises to the special challenges for military parent involvement. PTA National Standards showcased include: Standard 1) welcoming all families in the school community; Standard 3) supporting student success; and Standard 6) collaborating with community.

Pat Olmstead, Family Support Coordinator at the Ware Elementary School in USD 475 on the military base at Ft. Riley, Kansas reports that even with special challenges facing military parents and children, schools can experience great academic success! These challenges she says are due to the fact that military families face special circumstances, such as multiple deployments of family members, continual stress given 24 hour television news coverage of world events, and then, while on military leave, families who are from all over the country, travel to visit extended family members.

Military life also creates other student mobility challenges because weekly turnover of students throughout the school year results in constant diagnostic testing of new students. Consequently, children, parents and the school are continually having to make adjustments, which calls for flexibility on the part of the school given these special circumstances. But, even with these challenges, Ms. Olmstead says that Ware ES values parent involvement and has implemented multiple strategies to foster student success and parent involvement.

Ware ES “kicks-off” the year with home visits that are conducted by teachers and all certified school staff. While the visits only last a few minutes, this is an important first contact that parents have with the school, as well as an opportunity to give parents an informational packet about the school and ways they can support their children’s learning at home. The evening before school starts is a “Back-to-School-Night,” which is another opportunity for parents and children to visit with their teachers and see their classroom and for the children, an opportunity to find their desk and unload their backpacks.

Due to the special attendance challenges created by deployments, Ware ES sponsors an awards ceremony, for parents and children once a quarter

Demographic Statistics for Ware ES (USD 475)

Total number of Students	629
Economically Disadvantaged	72.18%
African American	14.94%
Hispanic	7.00%
White	55.01%
Other	23.05%

Reading – Proficient and Above: 99.6% of all students; 99.4% free and reduced lunch students

Math – Proficient and Above: 98.4% of all students; 97.7% free and reduced lunch students

to recognize and honor students with good attendance and grades. Local community business partners participate in this awards ceremony by providing incentives. Students with no absences or tardy slips receive coupons from the local Dominos and students on the high honor roll, receiving all “A’s,” are presented certificates from Burger King. Parents are also involved through the Ware Bears “Bear Bucks” program, a Title I program focused on improving children’s attendance by rewarding improved attendance with “Bear Bucks” the children can redeem for small prizes at the school’s Ware Mart Store, which is run by the 4th and 5th Grade Student Council.

Throughout the school year, the PTO, which meets on a monthly basis, collaborates with the Title I program to sponsor a variety of parent involvement activities. These activities include a Math Night, where parents can learn what their children are doing in math through fun and interesting activities; Chili Bingo Night, a very popular annual event with prizes donated by local businesses; a Reading Night, where children and parents have an opportunity to experience Dr. Seuss stories with guest readers; and an Internet Safety Night. Any of the events at Ware ES are geared for parents only and the school provides free day care to encourage parent attendance and participation. Parents are

also surveyed by the PTO to determine their areas of interest and opportunities for volunteering.

The school uses multiple means to communicate with families, including monthly newsletters that share important information and flyers to promote upcoming events. Because most parents have email accounts, technology is also used to communicate on a regular basis. Contact is made with 100% of the parents during the Parent-Teacher Conferences, which are held on multiple evenings – 95% of the parents are able to come to the school and meet with their children’s teacher and alternative contact is made with the other 5% who are not able to attend.

Parents are prepped with information prior to students taking the state assessments. To get the children “pumped up” for testing, the school has a special “State Testing Kick-Off” event, to which parents are also invited. One year involved teachers performing a scene from the musical “Grease,” and included elaborate costumes and props.

An annual Christmas tradition involves parents surprising the children with beautifully decorated hallways. The families, community, and school also collaborate each Christmas to adopt between seven and ten families that are generously supported with gifts of toys and clothing through Ware’s “Coins for Caring” program.

Another annual tradition each May is “School in Review,” a themed event where parents and community members are invited to learn what the children have accomplished during the school year and view children’s work that is displayed throughout the school. To celebrate, there are tours of the school, activities in which all can participate, and new foods to try. Each year’s Review sports a different theme with special decorations and exhibits. Past events have included “Port of Call,” where “Cruise Wear,” was the theme of the day; and “Learning A to Z,” where each class took a letter and researched something beginning with that letter.

It is these kinds of activities which create a sense of family for children and parents at Ware ES, where families are often disrupted through parents’ involvement in military service. The example of Ware ES shows that despite the challenges faced by military families, schools can step up to the plate and still promote quality parent involvement and

academic success!

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Parent Involvement as a District Wide Effort: Wichita USD

The following example demonstrates how a comprehensive model of parent involvement in the Wichita USD 259 has promoted quality parent involvement across the entire district. This example exemplifies how all the PTA National Standards for Family School Partnerships can effectively be addressed and promoted.

According to Jackie Lugrand, Parent Teacher Resource Supervisor, USD 259 recently embarked upon a massive restructuring of parent and community resources, grounded in the belief that every staff member needs to be able to work with families and community effectively. Ms. Lugrand commented, "There is now a body of research available that we used as the basis for building the framework for parent and community engagement." She continued, "There is no one plan we can hand every building to implement. Each parent involvement team has to use the framework and the available tools to formulate what will work best for their unique school community."

All elementary schools and all of the Title I middle schools have a Parent Involvement (PI) Contact. PI Contacts are paid a stipend for monthly district training, required reading and/or assignments from training, and to conduct building parent involvement team meetings. PI Contacts are the keys to building capacity among staff members in their buildings to work with families. They facilitate the flow of information, but perhaps far more importantly, they are able to motivate and persuade the staff to be persistent in this important, yet challenging work. One of the greatest benefits gained from the work with PI Contacts has been the sharing of good ideas.

PI Contacts receive resources and tools for their buildings, as needed, on topics such as:

- Parent-teacher and student-led conferences
- Compacts and policies
- Communicating with parents
- Cultural proficiency
- Linking to learning

In addition to the PI Contact, Title I schools have a Parent and Community Resource Specialist (PCRS) two days per week. PCRS's have extensive training and knowledge of parent involvement research. Last

Demographic Statistics for Wichita USD 259

Total number of Students	48,475
Economically Disadvantaged	66.09%
African American	20.64%
Hispanic	23.50%
White	42.64%
Other	13.22%
Reading – Proficient and Above: 70% of all students; 63.2% of free and reduced lunch students	
Math – Proficient and Above: 68.79% of all students; 62.5% of free and reduced lunch students	

year, the first year of restructuring, PCRS's had two days per week of staff development during which they identified and collaboratively read 56 titles on parent involvement. As part of that process they culled down that list to what they now call the "Blue Ribbon" list of books, which includes 16 "must read books" on parent involvement. This year PCRS's have one day per week of staff development.

Continuing their extensive parent involvement efforts, early in the 2008-09 school year, the district brought in Karen Mapp, coauthor of *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships*, (one of the "Blue Ribbon" books) to work with parents, site council members, community partners, teachers, principals and staff on cultivating and sustaining relationships and linking partnerships to learning.

PCRS's assist the principals and staff by assessing staff development needs, providing resources, and facilitating staff development. PCRS's support, coordinate and implement parent involvement activities at individual school sites, within feeder patterns and at the district level. They have been instrumental in creating many of the district resources, such as materials for porch visits, and post cards for welcome back to school, parent-teacher conferences and upcoming assessments. Parent and Community Resource Specialists have created a series of planning guides to support schools. Each guide includes a "best practices"

section, a research bibliography, and a “key considerations” section. Examples include:

- *How to Conduct Porch Visits*
- *How to Recruit and Use Volunteers More Effectively*
- *How to Organize Enrollment at Your School*
- *Effective Communication with Parents*

Principals have also been encouraged to hire or, if budget absolutely prohibits, designate a volunteer coordinator. The volunteer coordinator is supported by district staff with training and resources. It is very beneficial to the staff and the volunteers to have someone officially designated to coordinate volunteer activities in each building, because a well organized group of volunteers can have a tremendous impact on student achievement and a positive impact on the culture of a building.

In addition to these restructuring efforts, USD 259 will continue their involvement in Joyce Epstein’s National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) at Johns Hopkins University, as a charter member of this organization since its inception in 1996. NNPS invites schools, districts, states, and organizations to join together and use research-based approaches to organize and sustain excellent programs of family and community involvement – programs which will increase student success in school. NNPS also guides district leaders to help their schools develop goal-oriented programs of family involvement and community connections that meet all NCLB parent involvement requirements. (For more information visit: www.csos.jhu.edu)

Ms. Lugrand reports that through extensive evaluation of the district’s efforts for parent involvement, results have shown that the district has been extremely effective, with schools reporting many positive outcomes, including the promotion of positive contact with parents, and teachers reporting increased interest and success with parent involvement activities and efforts.

Contact Information:

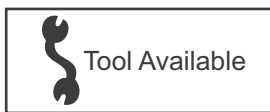
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Effective Communication

- Effective Communication Defined
- Top 5 Reasons
- Reaching Hard-to-Reach Parents
- Best Practices
- Considerations for Planning
- What's Your Vision?
- Evaluation
- Resources



Parent Involvement Guide to Effective Communication is produced by the Parent and Community Connection Team of Wichita Public Schools.

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Effective Communication Defined

Effective two-way communication is the foundation for building relationships between home and school. It is an ongoing process that provides equal opportunities for participation. Meaningful communication encourages, informs, invites, educates and solicits input.

Each school must customize effective communication for its unique community and culture. The first step in the planning process is to establish a "communication vision" for your school.

- What do we want to achieve?
- What are our short-term and long-term goals?
- How will we achieve these goals?
- How will we measure our success?
- What will we do after we have achieved our initial goals?



Top 5 Reasons Why Home-School Communication is Beneficial

1. Establishes trust between school and families.
2. Encourages higher and realistic parental expectations.
3. Serves as the first step to future parent involvement.
4. Leads to a higher degree of parental commitment to help improve student achievement.
5. Puts everyone on the "same page."

By taking the time to create a plan for effective home school communication, your efforts will pave the way for all future contacts with families. When your first contact is a positive one, parents will feel more comfortable hearing from you later. Positive rapport and support will improve your productivity and your relationships with both the child and the parents.

Reaching Hard-to-Reach Parents


Your school should make an effort to reach parents who are not normally involved. But how will you know who those parents are?

If you are serious about improving communication and family engagement, you will need to track your efforts and the results. A simple database can serve this purpose. Start with a list of every student and family. As families attend school functions or receive communications from the school, document these contacts in the database. Your school office can assist with accessing this information. After several events, you will quickly be able to determine which families are engaged and which are not.

This type of documentation provides you with other valuable information. You can track parent participation by grade level, classroom, race, gender, etc.

One teacher sets aside 10 minutes each day to make one personal call and write one personal postcard. By the end of the month, each parent has received two personal contacts from the teacher (one phone call and one postcard).

Best Practices

- **Listen and Learn**—Schedule individual conferences with families at the beginning of the school year. Early conferences are for teachers to listen and learn from parents. This sends a message that you value parents' expertise and truly care about their children. Additionally, you will be able to use your new insights to better reach and teach your students.
- **Make Yourself Available**—Provide your e-mail address to parents at the beginning of the year, and ask parents to share their e-mail with you. This allows for regular individual and group communication with families. (Example: Make small magnets with the school phone number, teacher name and contact information to hand out during open house or parent-teacher conferences.)
- **Utilize New Technology**—Provide ParentLink training to key staff for optimum utilization. ParentLink can be an effective form of communication schoolwide, by grade level, by classroom, or by other demographic.
- **Utilize the Classroom Newsletter for Two-way Communication**—Provide a section in the classroom newsletter for parents to communicate with the teacher. Use a tear-off form at the bottom of the page. Reward students for bringing back completed forms.
-  **Use Positive Postcards**—Positive postcards are an effective way to send a personal message to each home. The PTR Center offers pre-printed postcards that welcome students back to school, advertise parent-teacher conferences and remind parents of state assessment dates.
- **Be Friendly**—Take the time to speak briefly to parents when they pick up or drop off students. Teachers have the best relationships with the parents they see regularly.
- **Communicate Positively by Mail**—Keep a file of ready-to-use notes and pre-addressed envelopes handy, such as: *Thank You, Way To Go, Get Better Soon*, etc.
- **Utilize Daily Planners**—Keep parents informed of student progress and activities with daily planners. Incorporate several minutes of “planner time” into the morning and afternoon classroom routines.
- **Use the Welcome Wagon Approach**—As new families join your school throughout the school year, deliver a *Welcome To Our School* packet that includes a recent school newsletter and calendar, copies of relevant policies and programs, school brochure, etc.
- **Make It Clear**—Provide parents with clear information on class-level achievement expectations, school policies, discipline procedures, assessment tools and school goals.

Considerations for Planning

Questions to consider when planning communication strategies:

- What are our communication goals?
- What outcomes are expected?
- Who needs to be involved in the planning?
- Who is our target audience?
- Are there communication expectations specific for teachers, staff and administrators?
- What procedural communication practices are in place for teachers to address classroom concerns?
 - Face-to-face meeting with families
 - Letter sent home with the student
 - Note in the agenda/planner
 - Letter by mail
 - Phone call
 - E-mail
 - Home visit
- Have parents been given opportunities to share which method of communication they prefer?
- How are communication opportunities offered to parents?
- What methods will be used to communicate? How often? By whom?
- Are there intentional opportunities for parents to communicate with the school (PTO, Site Council, parent forums, etc.)?
- Are proper accommodations made for all parents to participate (interpreters, time and preferences)?



ASK ME

How was school today? "Fine."

What did you do? "Nuthin'."

Teachers can help parents get meaningful information about their child's learning with this simple tip. Send parents an "ASK ME" list. This is a list of specific questions that reflect what has been taught in the classroom that week. For instance,

ASK ME: Why are the trees changing colors now?

ASK ME: How do you draw a rhombus?

ASK ME: Why is a year 365 days?

"ASK ME" questions can be part of the regular classroom newsletter, or they can be sent home separately. They could also be included in a message using ParentLink.

What's Our Vision?



Here's My Child, Handle With Care

On your own, how long would it take you to get to know your students and pinpoint their individual personality traits? Wouldn't it be nice to have an expert provide you with a cheat sheet? Who better than parents to supply you with the information you need?

Ask parents to complete *Here's My Child, Handle With Care* form. This form allows parents to share valuable information that might otherwise take weeks to learn. Parents may choose from a list of personality traits such as: quiet, competitive, dramatic and humorous. It allows parents to elaborate about what the child does well, areas of struggle, hobbies and special circumstances, such as a recent divorce or death in the family.

Hint: A few weeks after you have had time to get to know your students, take a second look at the information. You may find the information more meaningful.

An example of two-way communication at a local elementary school: *Each day, if a student is absent at 9:30 a.m., one person from the school makes a positive phone call to the home to check on the well-being of the student. Families are informed of class work that the student has missed, and they are encouraged to assist the student with their make-up work. Parents are usually astonished to hear what is accomplished during the school day. Remarkable growth and a significant drop in absenteeism have resulted from better personal communication with parents.*

Something to Remember





Evaluation

- Did we meet the goals we set in regards to effective communication?
- Has there been an increase in parent communication with the school? How was it measured? (Example: Data collection from surveys, reflection forms, etc.)
- Have we identified additional communication needs through this process?
- Is this a method of communication that should be used in the future?
- What could we do differently? Consult staff and parents for ideas.

Resources

The *Parent Involvement Guide to Effective Communication* and accompanying tools are available on the Parent Involvement portal.

-  *Back-to-School Communication Teacher-Tested Tips*
-  Communication Planning calendar
-  Positive postcards
-  Communication log
-  *Here's My Child, Handle With Care* survey
- Customer service training

