



PRACTICAL PARENTING PARTNERSHIPS

Working Together for Our Children

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“Parental effort is consistently associated with higher levels of achievement. Schools would need to increase per-pupil spending by more than \$1000 in order to achieve the same results that are gained with parental involvement.”

...Karen Smith Conway, researcher, University of New Hampshire

PPP – A Visionary Organization

By Darlene Robinett, Founding Director

What is now entering the national discussion through powerful voices as something new and fresh? A framework of family involvement! The Harvard Family Research Project has outlined its proposal in the recent issue of its publication, *Evaluation Exchange*. It points to years of research, interviewing schools and parent organizations across the nation. The framework comprises three components:

1. Family involvement occurs in all contexts where children live and learn.
2. Family involvement matters from birth through adolescence but changes as children mature.
3. Family involvement is characterized by mutual responsibility among families, schools, and other institutions and stakeholders (community).

However, receiving little attention from these prominent researchers, federal efforts, and well-funded private or government initiatives, Practical Parenting Partnerships has been leading the way for years. In 1990, PPP established a vision, mission, assumptions and goals (www.pppctr.org click on *about us*) that encompass the above three components and that are as relevant today as they were 18 years ago.* Not only were these determinations made in the process of building a framework for a comprehensive parent/family involvement in education, but a plethora of same-based professional development and resource materials have been developed to put these ideas into practice. This is no small accomplishment. Welding research, vision, and talking points together into actual materials with practical applications in schools requires determination, hard work, stamina, cooperation, and supportive policy and funding.

Through the years, the PPP framework of parent/family involvement has expressed itself in a variety of ways at both state and local levels. For example, the PPP Center cooperates with a number of initiatives that involve families - Healthy Families, Community Partnerships, Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention, etc. At the same time, local schools may join with community health centers and fire departments to provide health fairs. In the annual reports just collected, examples of PPP in action included staff participation in PPP training and professional development in parent involvement, home visits to help families transition into kindergarten, family nights at elementary schools to guide families in helping their children read, meetings and various media used to support middle school parents in their efforts to help their children achieve higher test scores, homework assignments with suggested applications for families, distribution of college enrollment information to high school parents, lending libraries of materials for parents and families, expanded flexible opportunities for parent-teacher conferences, and parent discussion groups following shared parent-child breakfasts.

To continue like efforts, parent involvement policy and support will need to be strengthened. In Missouri, school boards are required through legislation to formulate a parent involvement policy and review it each year, with parents participating in the review and revamping. But how powerful is a policy that has no oversight

when schools are pressured from numerous and conflicting sources, especially those with money and accountability attached? Some researchers have said that part of the problem lies in the overriding emphasis on instruction rather than on the whole child in our nation's education policy, thus leaving out important factors in student achievement. Another is the never-ending pursuit of the quick fix rather than sustained cooperative efforts over years. Changing an instructional technique in a classroom is much easier than changing personal relationships, school climates, and structures necessary for parent/family involvement to flourish. For parents to do their jobs effectively, they also need support from employers, school personnel, extended family, community members, and those influencing popular culture.

Perhaps it should be enough for us to know what research tells us: that parent/family involvement promotes school success for every child of every age. (www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/pubs/pubslst.html#fimd) Unfortunately, knowledge and practice are still miles apart in parent/family involvement. We must all seriously work to establish a framework tied to and supported by the whole educational process. Continue to use PPP and you will be leaders for the nation in educating our children.

*The process of building a framework of comprehensive parent/family involvement in education began in Missouri in 1990. The vision and expertise of many individuals were tapped to create Practical Parenting Partnerships. These state and national leaders represented education, counseling, philanthropy, social services, business, and health. Theoretical foundations were drawn from several existing entities and combined to provide a powerful framework. The influence of PAT is evidenced in PPP's developmental theory and research emphasis; the influence of PPE, a Texas program, is revealed in PPP's family systems approach; and the support of MODESE has brought state and national education standards to practical applications of PPP.

PPP CENTER UPDATE

by Janet Shepard, Director

Once again summer has flown by and finds us at the beginning of a new school year. Whether you are returning to the same building and same classroom for the 20th year or you are in a new location with a new title, we hope this finds you facing the year with enthusiasm, purposefulness and a resolve for partnering with the families of your students!

We have just completed the preparation of year-end reports. That and data shared by some of our collaborating partners has afforded us the opportunity to do some reflection on how we do our work with you. We are looking for feedback from you to know what you need from PPP in order to sustain implementation of your parent involvement plan over time. We will be piloting a 30-60 minute workshop for all staff in two PPP districts in the next few months. Through a data collection process in these two districts, staff members have identified assistance with parent involvement as a need. Eventually these short workshops might take the place or be a part of the site visit. We will keep you posted on our experiences and lessons learned. Let us hear from you if you have suggestions on this topic!

Last month we posted regional meeting and training dates. The annual conference will be April 3 and 4, 2009. We hope to see you at one or more of these professional development opportunities!

WORKING ON THE WEB

by Vickie Dickneite, Resource Coordinator

www.freerice.com is a great vocabulary builder for adults and teens. For every definition you choose correctly, 20 grains of rice are donated by many sponsors through the UN World Food Program to help end hunger. They attach a Warning: "This game may make you smarter. It may improve your speaking, writing, thinking, grades, job performance..." What a great trade-off, to help those who are hungry just by learning!

<http://edtech.kennesaw.edu/jcheek1/larts.htm> Try this site if you have any language arts needs, grammar questions or are simply looking for another educational site to add to your list. It contains games and sections detailing common grammar mistakes. This is an excellent site for literature, writing and other topics related to language arts.

<http://ncsu.edu/midlink/newest.htm> is a site dedicated to teachers, students, and parents who are looking for something *more*—for those who want a challenge or an opportunity to view projects and gather inspiration and new ideas to use in their own classrooms. Any teacher of students ages 8 - 18 is invited to participate. Lots of technology is used here, and students can take part in a number of projects that may not be available in the regular classroom.

www.spellingcity.com is a free site that allows users to enter their own words or spelling lists to be spelled. It's a great tool for those who need extra practice or are looking for new ways to study. The site also contains fun games like hang mouse (similar to hangman), word searches, unscramble, and more.

<http://www.medtropolis.com/vbody.asp> The Virtual Body is a kid-friendly teaching tool to help reinforce learning about the human body. Take a guided tour and listen to a description of how digestion takes place.

GRANTS

by Vickie Dickneite, Resource Coordinator

http://foundationcenter.org/pnd/rfp/rfp_item.jhtml?id=217000004 Do Something is inviting America's middle and high schools to reduce their carbon footprint this fall through the "Increase Your Green" competition.

Participants must make concrete efforts toward reducing the environmental impact of their school during the eight-week competition. All initiatives must be youth-designed and -led. A representative from each group must submit an online report of the school or club's actions to save energy, reduce waste, and raise awareness during the competition.

Winners will be chosen based on the impact of their school's actions during the competition. The main judging categories are: 1) energy saved; 2) garbage reduced, recycled, and reused; 3) number of people involved/impacted; and 4) innovative quality of actions and ideas.

The competition is open to middle and high schools. Participating schools are eligible for a first-place prize of \$1,500, a banner, plaque, and eco-friendly gift bags. Three second-place prizes of \$500 each will also be awarded. Winners will be featured on the Do Something Web site and in local press.

Students should register their club or school to receive an "Increase Your Green" action guide with tip sheets and materials (i.e., stickers, posters, flyers) to help launch the competition at their schools. The competition opens October 13 and closes December 8. The deadline for online submission forms detailing action taken during the competition is December 15, 2008.

Google Grants - Deadline: Rolling--Google Grant recipients are selected every quarter.

Internet search engine Google offers nonprofits a chance to generate donations via free ads on its Web space. The Google Grants program supports organizations that share the company's philosophy of community service, and focus on a strong mission addressing areas such as science and technology, education, global public health, the environment, youth advocacy and the arts.

Google is giving away accounts in its AdWords system, which allows nonprofits to create 25 campaigns per account, 100 Ad Groups per campaign, 1,000 keywords per Ad Group and a virtually unlimited number of ads per Ad Group.

Please note: The Google Grants application form only asks applicants to create one sample ad and keyword list. You should submit an ad and keyword list that is most representative of your organization and its online goals. Submit your completed application online, the Google Grants committee is responsible for selecting award recipients. **Info:** <http://services.google.com/googlegrants/application>

RECENT RESOURCES

by Vickie Dickneite, Resource Coordinator

In Ten Talks Parents Must Have with Their Children about Violence, Dominic Cappello sets out to help parents teach their children how to avoid violent situations and stay safe. Each chapter includes a new topic and introduction--violence in the home, in the media, at school, etc.--and then offers thorough notes and questions for adults to ponder. Guidelines on how to launch the conversation with children follow, along with words to review and single-sentence stories for discussion.

The Kids' Guide to Working Out Conflicts-How to Keep Cool, Stay Safe, and Get Along by Naomi Drew, M.A., is a book for kids ages 11-up. It addresses common problems, such as misunderstandings and teasing, and the more serious issues of bullying and sexual harassment. Tools such as visualization, relaxation, exercise, and repeating empowering statements build a framework for improving self-control.

The Leader's Guide to the Kids' Guide to Working Out Conflicts-How to Keep Cool, Stay Safe, and Get Along by Naomi Drew, describes common forms of conflict, the reasons behind conflicts, and various positive ways to deal with and defuse tough situations at school, at home, and in the community without getting physical.

No Room for Bullies-From the Classroom to Cyberspace, edited by Jose' Bolton, Sr., Ph.D., L.P.C., and Stan Graeve, M.A., asks, "Who plays the bullying intimidation game and how?" Parents, Teachers, and school administrators will find ways to work together to provide students with a sense of safety and learn what to do when a child bullies, is bullied, or suffers "bystander silence".

E-Parenting-Keeping up with Your Tech-Savvy Kids by Sharon Miller Cindrich is a reference to provide everything you need to know about new technologies and how to make the most of them with your family. Learn how to safely 'surf' the internet, find appropriate video games with value, learn about blogging, MP3s, cell phones, and webcams.

FACILITATION TIPS

by Janet Shepard, Training Coordinator

Pulling the PPP team together for a meeting should be on your back to school list of things to do. Here are some agenda items for your consideration for this organizational meeting:

- Review the annual report you submitted to PPP or use some other tool to review and evaluate your efforts last year.
- Decide who will attend PPP regional meeting, annual conference and training.
- Check to see that all team members are signed up for the electronic newsletter.
- Forward this newsletter to ALL staff in your building / district and invite them to sign up.
- Review family interest survey results from the spring or create a survey to be given out at back to school open house or some other event early in the new school year.
- Use the survey results to plan this year's work.

- Review your building / district parent involvement policies and any other written documents which address parent involvement. The kindergarten transition plan is another one you may wish to review.
- Plan a time to share with the whole staff an overview of PPP in your building. Be sure to include when, where and how to use PPP resources notebooks and other publications.
- Set your team / PPP advisory board meetings for the remainder of the year.
- Plan how you will document and evaluate your efforts this year.
- Set your priorities for the year then plan your work to meet those priorities. If increasing student attendance is a goal for your building then plan your parent involvement around improving student attendance. Target your activities to achieve your goals.

Above all, remember that building relationships with family and community members strengthens your work with students. When home, school and community work together toward common goals for our children, our success comes more quickly and has greater impact.

HOME VISITING

by Janet Shepard, Training Coordinator

At PPP we always say there is no right or wrong way to use the resource materials included with training. One school social worker in southeast Missouri has found the activities in the home visiting resource notebooks useful in her work with student groups. The activity sheets help the students clarify their thoughts, give them an outlet other than group discussion for expressing those thoughts and provide them something tangible to share with their families if they wish.

For instance Notebook # 17 is on Conflict Resolution. This is a topic that probably comes up fairly often in student groups facilitated by the school social worker. There are three handouts which would be appropriate for students of most ages. The first is titled *Problem Solving Techniques* and lists four action steps. The second called *Steps to Resolving Conflict* gives more specific strategies beginning with cool down, identify the problem and ending with negotiation and reaching an agreement. Students might role play after reviewing this list. The final handout is *Thoughts to Remember When I am in Conflict with Others*. This one should aid students in self regulation of their behavior. Students might pick one from the list such as “I am responsible for taking care of my own needs” and design a poster for their room at home or make a card to attach to the inside front of a notebook. A follow-up home visit with the family on this topic would help reinforce the lesson learned in group and give the family a chance to support the child.

If you are not sure about availability of these resource notebooks in your school, check with your PPP Coordinator or give us a call at the center. The notebooks are available with PPP home visit training.

TEACHING CHILDREN TO DEAL WITH THEIR FEELINGS

by Shelly Lock, Program Development Coordinator

Different environments and people generate different feelings in children. Helping children build strategies to cope with these feelings is healthy. For example, a child may have high anxiety about starting a new school year, may feel a sense of fear when around a class bully, may get very nervous before a test, or may be very tense when around new people or trying to make new friends. Learning how to deal with the worry and fear can help combat the potential for compulsive thoughts about bad things that might happen. It is not fair or realistic to tell the child to just stop worrying. She needs strategies to help them cope with their feelings.

Here are a few strategies children can use to deal with their stress. *Relaxation techniques* such as taking a deep breath and releasing or tightening muscles and relaxing them can help. Have your child practice these when not under stress so that he or she is ready to use them. *Deep breathing* is most beneficial when done slowly and deeply. Practice together and feel the calming effect. *Muscle tightening* can be done by squeezing your hands

or arms or toes and holding them tightly for the count of 20 then relaxing the muscle. These techniques are quick and can be done anywhere and anytime. You can also teach your child to *picture himself doing the behavior* he wants to see happen (such as acing the test, laughing and having fun in her new class, walking away confidently from the bully, etc.) *Self talk* is another strategy that can help a child cope during stressful times. He can tell himself, "I have done this before and everything turned out fine." Or "That bully is just trying to get attention because of poor self esteem." Again, it is helpful to practice some self talk lines ahead of time so that the child knows what he can say to himself. Your child can keep a journal or box to put her worries and fears in. This will give the child an opportunity to release the feelings she is carrying with her.

Feelings can become very strong and influence a child's actions. Sometimes children give up and stop doing things for fear of failure or avoid new situations because of fear or nervousness. These techniques can help children persevere through tough times. Certainly, as adults, we need to be sensitive to their feelings and not discount the validity of these feelings. We also must help them sort out when it is important to tell an adult about their fear, such as when it involves a fear for their physical safety, such as when a weapon is involved or when there is a verbal threat of one. It is important that we let children know that fear, anxiety, and worrying is normal. It is how they learn to deal with it that makes all the difference.

A newsletter published by the PPP Center for parents and educators participating in the PPP program.

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For information on the PPP program, please contact:

PPP Center Staff:

Director	Janet Shepard 573/761-7767 jshepard@pppctr.org
Program Development Coordinator	Shelly Lock 573/761-7766 slock@pppctr.org
Resource Coordinator	Vickie Dickneite 573/761-7765 vdickneite@pppctr.org
Office Manager	Patty Stegemann 573/761-7770 pppctr@pppctr.org

Phone 573/761-7770

Fax 573/761-7760

**FORWARD THIS NEWSLETTER
TO YOUR CO-WORKERS!**



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BEGINNING A NEW SCHOOL YEAR WITH CONFIDENCE

by Darlene Robinett, Founding Director

Recently a television newscaster remarked, “Parents do matter!” This was the final thought in a feature about Hannah Montana (Mylie Cyrus) and her growing up under the watchful eyes of both of her parents. Although they may make mistakes, they want to avoid the pitfalls other young teen idols like Britney Spears and Lindsey Lohan have experienced. Parents are important every step of the way for children and youth to achieve to their highest potential throughout their lives.

Each new school year begins with hope for success. It should also begin with confidence of both parents and students that they can achieve together. A basic element to remember and to prepare for is better communication with each other and with the school. At home, continue to encourage your child to talk to you about school by asking very specific questions, such as what he read during free reading or what kinds of math problems he successfully solved today. By all means, encourage the free flow of conversation in your family. Expect your child to participate in family discussions at the dinner table or during any shared activities. These conversations give you insights into some of your child’s joys and struggles and, at the same time, allow him to develop reasoning abilities and vocabulary.

To build ease of communication with your child’s school, start early by paying attention to what the teacher outlines as a plan for communicating. There may be a weekly letter or a calendar of class activities. Ask questions if you need something made clear. Find out how to contact the teacher at school, including the possibility of sending emails. Let the teacher know if you can only talk to her in the evening so that an arrangement can be made ahead of time. Any opportunity you have to talk with a teacher about your child, realize that you know your child better than anyone and you can share your insights as well as listen to what the teacher can tell you about your child’s behavior and accomplishments in the classroom. Together you should be able to figure out the best ways to help your child learn, because each of you brings different experiences to the table. Be willing to listen; but also be willing to share helpful information.

Make it easier for your child to complete homework and be ready for each school day by establishing routines. Try to keep consistent bedtimes, have a place set aside for doing schoolwork, start the day off with a routine and a hug or expression of encouragement, check your child’s backpack for any notes or assignments, limit time spent watching television or playing on the computer, and allow some time for physical activity.

Display examples of good school work and messages of praise for everyone in the family to see. Your child will know that you value and appreciate her efforts to learn and achieve at school.

Most importantly, remember that your children need you, no matter their age. Nothing can take the place of a loving and concerned parent.

1. Talk with your child every day; encourage conversations that allow you to explore ideas.
2. Learn ways to communicate with the school and your child’s teachers; share your knowledge about your child.
3. Establish routines at home to help your child manage time and be physically and mentally ready for school.
4. Celebrate your child’s efforts in school.
5. Be that constant watchful eye in your child’s life.