



FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Keeping It Fresh Yet Familiar

by Janet Shepard, Director

“Plant flowers every spring.” This line on the *Life’s Little Instructions* poster which hangs in our office jumped out at me this week for a couple of reasons. First it spoke literally and directly to a goal I had set for myself for this fall that had to do with dividing perennials and filling all of my flower beds with plants which would come back each year thus making them as maintenance free as possible.

The quote also seemed to gel the ideas floating around in my mind for this month’s newsletter about keeping fresh ideas for parent involvement circulating in your school while still doing some of the same things each school year. That idea began forming while in the very early stages of planning the newsletter. I kept asking myself what I could write about that was new and exciting for the back to school issue. Soon it dawned on me that, our message doesn’t have to be new and fresh each fall because we are speaking to a new audience or we are speaking to a familiar audience who has new students and new families this school year.

At your school you are working with parents who have just enrolled their oldest child in kindergarten and who just need to know that their child is happy and feels safe at school and need some guidance on how to be involved; or with parents who don’t quite recognize their child who is becoming a teen and middle schooler and who need some direction on how to stay involved without infringing on their child’s expressed need for some distance; or parents of seniors who will be transitioning at the end of the year into a university or the workforce and who are trying to guide and support their student into a rapidly changing world. Those concerns are the concerns of parents every year, but new parents transition with their children into your school or grade level each year. Each year a new group of parents need your reassurance, guidance and partnership. Your parent involvement plan is in place to assist you in meeting those same needs each year with each new set of parents.

Your plan should have both some perennials and some annuals. The perennials are the events and resources that folks can count on each year such as open house, parent teacher conferences, fund raisers and curricular family nights. The annuals or the new seeds of ideas each year might include the building theme, the topic for family nights or a totally new opportunity for parental engagement.

I think I knew I couldn’t really just plant flower beds and forget them. Just as you know you cannot create a parent involvement plan and expect it to implement itself. By planting some new seeds each year, we can add some interest and even excitement. We must also tend the perennials by checking on their progress, moving or making changes when needed. When we plant new and tend the dependable each year, our parent involvement planning and implementation becomes systematized and expected. Opportunities for family engagement can become rituals and rituals help shape the culture and climate of our schools. Missouri’s Parent and Family Involvement in Education Week observed annually the second week in September can be the perfect time to evaluate and nurture your parent involvement plan.

PPP CENTER UPDATE

by Janet Shepard, Director

Welcome back to school! For the first time since PPP opened a center in 1994 staff has had the summer off. It was great to have a break, but Shelly and I are both glad to be back at work! Shelly is designing and scheduling fall regional meetings and we will be announcing training dates around the state soon. Please call or e-mail to:

- Request training at your school or in your geographic area
- Order printed resources
- Schedule on site professional development or family nights
- Ask for a coaching session with your parent involvement team

PPP has received word that the Parent Information and Resource Center federal education grant has been funded for the fifth and final year. This will enable us to remain in place to serve you through this school year. We are, however, still dependent on funds we generate from working with schools. We are well aware that you have less money for professional development this year. Title I professional development and parent involvement funds may be your best sources of funding for working with PPP.

Governor Jay Nixon in a ceremony on August 18 proclaimed September 6-10 as Parent and Family Involvement in Education Week in Missouri. House Bill 2213 was signed into law in 2008 designating the second week in September annually as Parent and Family in Education Week. Governor Nixon encourages all residents to observe this event through activities that will bring about an increased awareness of the importance of parent and family involvement in a child's education. Please let us know what opportunities and activities you have scheduled that week.

GRANTS

Active play, healthy meals and reducing childhood obesity seems to be the theme for available grants this month. Parent involvement is an important component of all of these efforts. You might even look for a parent volunteer with grant writing experience.

- On the [Action for Healthy Kids](#) website you will find two opportunities. One is for funding for an expanded breakfast program. As pointed out on the website a good breakfast program can positively impact student attendance, behavior and performance. Schools can enter to win a visit from an NFL player and a \$10,000 grant by following the [contest rules](#) on the website. A similar grant opportunity is available through [KaBoom](#), a non-profit working to bring play back into the lives of children.
- Lowe's is now accepting application in their [Toolbox for Education](#) grant program. Applications are due no later than October 15, but may close earlier if the maximum number of applications is received prior to the 15th.

Any time you can include PPP in your applications, we are grateful. You could include the cost of our resource materials, training, coaching, professional development and more. We are also open to new ideas you might have for us.

RESOURCES – Focusing on Middle and High School Students

Food allergies can be difficult for students at any age, but perhaps more difficult for adolescents. The Summer issue of [Adolescent Shorts](#) is devoted to teen food allergies, new food allergy legislation which has policy and practice requirements for schools and more. You may wish to share this quarterly publication with staff and with parents through an e-mail or link on the district website.

[Teaching Tolerance](#) has a new DVD on bullying coming out in September. You can pre-order your free copy by going to the website. The title is *Bullied: A Student, a School and a Case That Made History* and it focuses on gay and lesbian students as the target of bullying. Teaching Tolerance recommends it for grades 6-12. You will find many other useful articles and free resources on their website. This new resource and many other resources on the site could be useful in observing National Bullying Prevention Month.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- September 6-10 Family Involvement in Education Week in Missouri
- September 30 Third Annual [Child Abuse Prevention Summit Jefferson City 10:00 -5:00](#)
- October [National Bullying Prevention Month](#)

FACILITATION TIPS – Reaching Parent Who are Distanced

by Janet Shepard, Director

A commitment to building relationships with parents means reaching out to all parents no matter where they may be or their station in life. Not only does PPP promote this belief but we try to support you in taking action. This summer [ParentLink](#) invited us to be a partner in the Prison Parenting Corners project by providing literature.

Several years ago PPP wrote a publication for schools on reaching out to distanced parents and a companion publication for parents who are distanced. While we have shared copies in our [resource lending kit](#) (click on resources) on Supporting Incarcerated Parents and Their Families, we have not printed or shared these publications widely.

The publication for parents will be shared in the Prison Parenting Corners in each of Missouri's correctional facilities. It is also posted on our website under [downloadable publications](#) as is the publication for schools. We are encouraging organizations which support families in incarceration to link to these publications, too. We hope you find these publications useful.

KINDERGARTEN TRANSITION – Planning for 2011-12

by Janet Shepard, Director

As you are greeting this year's students it is time to think about next year's students and their families. An early start in forming or renewing your kindergarten transition team will provide more time to reach out to all partners who can in turn help you begin relationship building with a larger number of next year's students and their families.

Make note of questions parents have during the first few days of school. Jot down areas of concern for children. What do you as a teacher wish you had known prior to the student's arrival? Are there patterns of who adjusts well? We expect children who have been in Head Start, Title I preschool, community day cares and Missouri

Preschool Project sites to adjust more easily. Where were the children last year who are less well prepared for kindergarten this year?

A May 2010 guide issued by the National League of Cities says the majority of children under the age of six who have non-parental care are cared for in Family, Friend and Neighbor Care (FFN). Quality, cost, flexibility, and trust are some of the reasons parents choose FFN care. Research suggests, however, FFN providers often need information on child development and on early learning.

In Kindergarten Transition training we talk about identifying and reaching out to FFN providers, but there may be more we can do. The National League of Cities Municipal Action Guide, [Promoting School Readiness by Improving Family, Friend and Neighbor Care](#) may be downloaded. It provides rationale, research, resources and best practices. I have added a copy to my Kindergarten Transition notebook and would recommend that you do the same.

We will be scheduling and posting training dates in the next issue of the newsletter. Please let us know if you would like to see this training offered in your area.

PASS IT ALONG!

by Shelly Lock, Program Development Coordinator

Do you ever feel like just when parent involvement events and activities seem to be going great, staff and/or parents involved in the planning move on? We often hear from schools, “We used to do that and it was great, but the person who coordinated it left.” There’s no need to let the successful efforts end. Think about how to pass on the information so that others can pick it up and continue it without having to start over with planning. PPP has supported schools in a notebook system to record planning meetings, personnel needed, necessary supplies, donations, attendance, activities, timelines, costs, feedback, suggestions for the next year, etc. These notebooks should be kept up to date and can then be passed on from year to year. There is no reason to reinvent the wheel when success can continue with mere adjustments to reflect new needs and interests.

REGIONAL WORKSHOPS

by Shelly Lock, Program Development Coordinator

During the school year, PPP will continue to provide support to school staff through workshops held in various regions of the state. This year, our focus will be on increasing and improving ongoing parent involvement throughout the year. We will look at how parent involvement can be more than planned events, how to reach all parents, two way support through positive relationships, the correlation between parent engagement and meeting adequate yearly progress on the MAP test and the importance of collaborating various school and district parent involvement efforts. More information on regional workshops will be coming soon. We hope you can join us to share your thoughts, ideas and to get support in your parent involvement efforts!

SAVE THE DATE!

Children's Trust Fund Conference
April 13-15, 2011

Practical Parenting Partnerships was created in 1992 by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education with support from the Danforth Foundation.

PPP is sustained by a fee structure, contracts and grants with major funding from the U. S. Department of Education Parent Information and Resource Center (PIRC).

For information on the PPP program, please contact:

Director Janet Shepard, 573/761-7770
Program Development Coordinator Shelly Lock, 573/761-7770
Office Manager Patty Stegemann

jshpard@pppctr.org
slock@pppctr.org
pppctr@pppctr.org



BACK TO SCHOOL

by Shelly Lock, Program Development Coordinator

As summer winds down we begin to think about the upcoming school year. This brings excitement, fear, anxiousness, and other feelings, not just for our children, but also for parents. As parents, you may feel relieved that your child will be on a more structured schedule or may feel sad that the extra time together will be more limited. Students may feel excited to see their friends but nervous about an unknown new teacher, classroom, or maybe a new school.

There are things that families can do to ease the transition back into school. As parents get involved in school, it feels more comfortable for everyone. Involved parents get to know staff and realize their concern for the children, understand expectations more clearly, and can better support learning at home. Children perceive the comfort of their parents and likewise feel more comfortable with their school. So, what can you do to get involved and build a partnership with the school and increased comfort level?

- Provide information (verbally or written) that will help the teacher get to know your child.
- Offer to help by signing up to donate items or volunteer our time.
- Ask the teacher about expectations and rules for the classroom.
- Ask the teacher about types of homework and the amount that can be expected.
- Find out what you can do to support learning at home.
- Ask about the best way and time to contact the teacher.
- Make school a priority in your home, provide time and a place for homework, go through your child's backpack together, and talk about the school day.
- Visit the school prior to the first day, especially if your child will be transitioning to a new school.

Families may also experience increased stress in the mornings and evenings during the school year. Here are a few tips to help deal with meeting all of the demands of the school experience.

- Have backpacks organized and packed the night before with completed homework and anything that needs to go to school the next day.
- Lay clothes out the night before for the next school day.
- Plan for a healthy breakfast and lunch (if you pack lunch). Take time to grocery shop on the weekends and have quick, healthy options available.
- Set a bedtime for the school year and stick to it! Getting enough sleep can help everyone better deal with a busy schedule.
- Start the day off on a positive note with your child: give your child a smile, goodbye and a hug as he/she leaves in the morning. This positive energy will carry over into your child's school day.
- Establish a set time and place for your child to do homework daily.
- Stick to a routine as a family. This feels more comfortable to children as they know what to expect.
- Protect time in your schedule each evening to talk to your child about his or her school day, help with homework if necessary, and go through school papers. This will show your child how important school is!

With a positive attitude, effort to ease the transition into a new school year, and continued focus on partnering with the school, you and your child will have a great school year!