



"Public engagement is an ongoing, collaborative process during which the school district works with the public to build understanding, guidance, and active support for the education of the children in its community.

...National School Boards Association

Why Is Public Engagement Important for School Achievement?

By Darlene Robinett, Director

Involving parents, school staff, students, and community members in the process of setting academic goals and how to measure progress on the goals can positively influence the direction and success of school programs that lead to improved school achievement. When parents understand and support the school's educational standards, they are more likely to help their children meet expectations. When the community knows the standards, it is more likely to support them by providing the resources necessary to meet them. A shared understanding of what is expected is the beginning of securing public confidence and remaining accountable for outcomes. With public engagement also comes the opportunity for schools to learn about community conditions that might influence academic outcomes (lack of health care, poor housing, etc.)

How do school districts use public engagement to raise student achievement? First, public engagement is not simply one of a district's projects, but rather a way of doing business. They must examine processes for actually gathering knowledge from throughout the community, not simply to gather approval for the status quo or a desired identified outcome. For example, a district might simply hold a series of traditional public hearings or special school board meetings on as-needed basis; but if it really wants to have public engagement, it may devise continuous ways to communicate for an ongoing connection. It goes beyond providing information or good public relations to promoting substantive public participation in governance.

What are some strategies? Principals can make family involvement a high priority by providing their staff time, resources, and training on how to work with parents. They must stress the benefits of parent involvement. For example, parents can become schools' strongest advocates in influencing critical bond and levy votes. Several methods for engaging the public have been identified: focus groups that bring together a diverse group of 10-15 to discuss issues; telephone polls that can be used at any time to give an overview of public thinking; public meetings to give voice to opposing sides of an issue; email encouragement to connect and communicate with diverse audiences; study circles that are somewhat structured that bring small groups of policymakers and public representatives together over extended periods of time for discussion; and leadership teams of people who have knowledge of the district and access to top district leadership (teachers, parents, students, community members) for the purpose of monitoring progress and giving continuous feedback. Obviously, there are other strategies; but all must be highly visible and used together to guide and sustain a district's strategic planning. PPP can help your school district achieve better public engagement in children's education.

PPP CENTER UPDATE

by Darlene Robinett, Director

The upcoming PPP Fall Regional Meetings and the PPP Parent Involvement Conference, in addition to preparations for all the PPP trainings and PD workshops, have been the focus of the summer. Two summer projects that we feel will prove helpful are presenting in the parent involvement sections of Project Construct Institutes and beginning a new software data system for organization of our PPP library resources. Encouraging all schools to review their adopted parent involvement policies and to utilize PPP resources continues to be a year-round focus of our work. PPP is initiating a new format for the PPP newsletter that utilizes website capabilities. Soon, we plan to email a reminder and you can access the newsletter online at www.pppctr.org. We welcome your thoughts and suggestions as we change to a system of a “subscribe” newsletter.

Would your parents benefit from understanding more about GLEs or having a dictionary of education terms at their fingertips? Consider ordering copies of the PPP Parent Guide to GLEs or What Does That Mean? PPP Guide to School Terms. Check www.pppctr.org for order form for these and other PPP resources.

PPP SITE NEWS

by Darlene Robinett, Director

North Harrison R-3 School District - In its annual report, North Harrison Elementary stated, “Each year for the past 3 years we have incorporated family nights into our schedule. These often are theme-related and held at various evening hours that are convenient to our parents. This past year our theme was “Family Traditions”. Children and parents went through several centers that focused upon their own families’ traditions during the holiday season. Children were able to create a gift for their parent and wrap it while their parent was in the informational meeting utilizing PPP resources. Songs were shared and many traditions were learned that involved personal families’ as well as our community traditions. The attendance at family nights has increased each year, with an 11% increase between last year and the recent school year. We have witnessed an amazing difference in our parent-teacher communication line that is obviously influenced by the time spent together at these events.”

(For more stories, check www.pppctr.org Festival Award winners)

WORKING ON THE WEB

by Vickie Dickneite, Resource Coordinator

www.middleweb.com is a great site for new and seasoned middle school teachers. It offers tips and new ideas for teachers to take directly into their classrooms. One such tip to work on the social skills of middle-schoolers is the website below. In addition, those interested can sign up for a bi-weekly newsletter with information on resources and ideas just for middle school teachers.

<http://www.cccoe.net/social/skillslist.htm> Check out this site for numerous lessons in social skills for middle school students. No fancy bells or whistles, just simple lesson plans that lead to solid ideas and information on topics ranging from “passing in the hallway” to “expressing empathy.”

The MarcoPolo program provides no-cost, standards-based Internet content for the K-12 teacher and classroom, developed by national content experts. Online resources include panel-reviewed links to top sites in

many disciplines, professionally developed lesson plans, classroom activities, and materials to help with daily classroom planning. Marco Polo has now been integrated into the Verizon Thinkfinity search engine, making it an even more accessible and powerful resource. Go to <http://snipr.com/thinkfinity> resources to learn more about the site and how to use it. Go to http://snipr.com/thinkfinity_search to search the site.

GRANTS

by Vickie Dickneite, Resource Coordinator

<http://www.captainplanetfdn.org/grants.html> The Captain Planet Foundation offers grants of \$250-\$2500 for projects that:

- Promote understanding of environmental issues
- Focus on hands-on involvement
- Involve children and young adults 6-18 (elementary through high school)
- Promote interaction and cooperation within the group
- Help young people develop planning and problem solving skills
- Include adult supervision
- Commit to follow-up communication with the Foundation (specific requirements are explained once the grant has been awarded)

Deadlines are September 30, December 31, March 31, and June 30. Check the website for more information, and to find out about grant projects that Missouri and other states have done.

The Bayer Foundation supports programs that enhance the quality of life, provide unique and enriching opportunities that connect diverse groups, and ensure the preparedness of tomorrow's leaders. Specifically, the foundation supports programs for civic and social service program; science education and workforce development; and the arts, art education, and culture. Proposals in Missouri are reviewed on a rolling deadline (with a Bayer site in the greater Kansas City area.) For more information, go to www.bayerus.com/about/community/com_flow.html, or www.bayerus.com/about/community/i_foundation.html.

RECENT RESOURCES

by Vickie Dickneite, Resource Coordinator

The start of a new school year is always a time when excitement is high for teachers, students and parents alike. The following books may help to make the school year a success!

How to Teach Reading When You're Not A Reading Teacher was written because the author, Dr. Sharon H. Faber, was dismayed over twenty years ago as a Middle School English teacher that there were students who didn't or couldn't read, or who can read fluently, but not understand or remember what was read. The book is a compilation of ideas and strategies collected from many sources over the years. The many techniques may help you reach students in need.

It's So Much Work to Be Your Friend-Helping the Child with Learning Disabilities Find Social Success by Richard Lavoie provides expert advice on helping learning disabled children achieve social success. The book stresses communication and patience for parents looking to guide their children through the maze of social

interactions encountered daily, from arranging successful play dates and navigating the hidden curriculum of school, to language difficulties, social anxieties and family issues.

Diversity and Young Adolescents: More Than Color by Elizabeth D. Dore contains strategies for teachers to promote learning for adolescents in diverse settings. A large list of literature on diversity for teens is also included.

Don't let the title fool you into thinking that this is a "fluff" book. *If You Don't Feed the Teachers, They Eat the Students! A Guide to Success for Administrators and Teachers* by Neila A. Connors is a handy resource. This book is a menu for administrative success. It focuses on many important points, the first of which is to support, encourage and appreciate the teachers working with you.

Drumming to the Beat of Different Marchers by Debbie Silver includes practical strategies for educators to improve their instructional skills in a differentiated classroom. This is a good guide for educators focusing on how we can teach and still address individual differences in the classroom.

Implementing Student-Led Conferences by Jane M. Bailey and Thomas R. Guskey may prove to be a valuable resource for your fall conferences. The book gives an overview of student-led conferences, outlining the purpose and roles of each person in the meeting. The premise is to effectively communicate to parents the learning process of their children. Roles and responsibilities of participants are outlined, as well as instructions on preparation, organization and evaluation of the conference.

KINDERGARTEN TRANSITION

by Janet Shepard, Training Coordinator

As you welcome this year's new kindergarten students and their families, I hope you are also thinking about what might have helped ease the transition for the children, their parents, you and the school in general. We have talked a lot about partners who should be on the kindergarten transition team. There are at least two that we probably haven't stressed enough.

Local public health (LPH) organizations are often included on the transition team for their help with immunizations. They may have much more to offer. They may offer parenting education classes and family activity nights in your community. Perhaps there are ways you can help each other by promoting one another's opportunities for families or by co-sponsoring events.

WIC helps meet the nutritional needs of children up to age 5. Do you know who the WIC provider is in your county? It may be the LPH or it may be another agency. You can go to www.dhss.mo.gov/WIC and click on the families link to find the provider in your county. Identifying and working with community partners can help you communicate with more families.

Fall, 2007 PPP Regional Workshops!

Exciting New Family Activities

During this interactive workshop, participants will gain new ideas for planning family workshops and activities. A focus will be on helping families understand grade level expectations and MAP testing. We will also share ideas for specific curriculum related family fun nights that provide positive interaction between parents and children as well as give parents tips for promoting learning at home. We will review the new state requirement for a board adopted parent involvement policy (Senate Bill 480) and explore how schools can coordinate efforts such as family nights with their policy.

Dates and registration form can be found on our web site at www.pppctr.org.

Leaping into Action - PPP Family Festival

February 29 - March 1, 2008

Both newcomers to PPP and experienced veterans will find exciting presentations tailored to their needs.

Bring Your Whole Team!

- o PPP facilitators
- o Teachers
- o Community leaders
- o Collaborative partners
- o Families
- o Administrators
- o Policymakers

Benefits

- o Network with other PPP participants
- o Explore resources for your local PPP activities
- o Experience thought-provoking and entertaining sessions
- o Take back parent involvement ideas for your school improvement plan.

Registration:

Adult - \$150.00

Child - \$75.00

Registration includes Friday lunch and dinner, Saturday breakfast and lunch, breaks and all conference materials.

Registration form can be found on our web site at www.pppctr.org.

For hotel reservations, call 1-800-TANTARA. Rooms are \$85/night for 1-4 occupants.

Interested in presenting a conference session? Send proposal form found on www.pppctr.org **Due date:** Friday, September 28, 2007.

Pearl and VIP Awards applications are also found on www.pppctr.org. **Due date:** Friday, December 14, 2007.

PPP NEWSLETTER UPDATE!

Beginning with this issue, the PPP Newsletter will be placed on our web site, www.pppctr.org. If you would like to receive an email notice whenever a new issue is posted, please fill out the form below and fax to 573/761-7760 or email to pppctr@pppctr.org as soon as possible.

Name _____

Title _____

School District _____

School Building _____

Email Address _____

- ♣ Please email me with special announcements from the PPP Center.
- ♣ Please subscribe me to the PPP Listserv when it is up and running.

A newsletter published by the PPP Center for parents and educators participating in the PPP program. Edited by Darlene Robinett; layout by Patty Stegemann.

The Practical Parenting Partnerships program was developed with funding from the Danforth Foundation, St. Louis through the MO Dept of Elementary & Secondary Education.

For information on the PPP program, please contact:

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PRACTICAL PARENTING PARTNERSHIPS
Working Together for Our Children

September 2007

Are You Ready?

by Darlene Robinett, Director

Typically, the beginning of a new school year is a special time for both families and schools. We get an extra boost of adrenaline. We are filled with new energy and hope. The opportunity to begin anew appeals to our sense of adventure. However, to sustain this initial excitement, adequate preparation and attention to goals are necessary.

Everyone wants students to be successful, to feel confident, and to learn. Besides purchasing and organizing the supplies required by your child's school, you may wish to talk with your child about all his or her summer experiences, such as reading a good book, attending a camp, taking a trip, creating something, or learning a new skill. These all contribute to your child's development and education.

Can you help your child relate any experience to what she will encounter when school begins? For example, a camp group may have worked together to set up a tent, perform a skit, prepare a meal by campfire. Did your child learn anything about teamwork in the process? How might that help to carry out a classroom project? Perhaps your child learned to water ski this summer. Did he perform beautifully the first time or did he have to try several times to get up and stay up and then several more times to balance and gracefully jump waves? Was it okay to make mistakes along the way? Did failing on the first attempt keep him from trying again? How does the ability to persevere, or keep on going, assist your child in the classroom?

Help your child realize that participating in any appropriate summer activity can actually relate to his success at school this year. Help him see that life is a continual learning experience. Remember to use what you know about your child in encouraging him or her to do well in school.

Other things you can do to help your child have a successful school year:

1. At your earliest opportunity, have a brief discussion with your child's teacher(s). Let the teacher know something about your child – perhaps by giving an example of how he approached or completed a particular summer activity. Keep the story short and to the point! When the teacher knows a little more about your child, he may find a suitable learning approach for your child.

2. Vow to volunteer a few hours of your time to your child's school. This may be as simple as leading a parent phone tag team or preparing materials a teacher needs for a class project. These are activities you can do from your own home. You may take time to chaperone a field trip or help at a school event. Other activities, like serving on a decision-making committee, may be long-term and mean going to the school more often. The amount of time you are able to give, whether small or large, will contribute to a better school for your child to attend.

3. Check often on your child's progress. Don't allow small problems to become big ones for lack of attention. At the first sign of your child's frustration or poor attitude, take a proactive approach. Find out what is troubling your child. Work with the teacher to resolve the situation. Don't wait for the teacher to contact you, as it may take the teacher longer to recognize it, as she is paying attention to many other children in the class, too.

4. Remember to be respectful of your child's needs and the teacher's needs, as well as your own, when you are working to form a partnership with the school for your child's academic success.

5. Most importantly, remind yourself that you have the opportunity and the responsibility to influence your child's educational experiences!