Guiding Principles for School, Family and Community Partnerships

The Ohio Department of Education (ODE) has developed guiding principles for how Ohio's educational systems should act in regard to family, school and community partnerships. The seven Guiding Principles encompass the "what," the "why" and the "how" of these partnerships. ODE also presents suggestions for how the guiding principles impact practice. While many of the principles are fundamental, they may change as research and practice provide new insights.

Schools, communities and families should work together collaboratively to ensure that children and youth receive high-quality instruction, intervention, supports and services in a caring. learning environment. To this end, the Guiding Principles are:

1. Education of Ohio's children is a shared responsibility. Family and community engagement is critical for student academic success and well-being.
2. Honest, respectful, two-way communication among schools, families and communities is crucial to effective partnerships.
3. Family and community engagement benefits students, schools and families at all stages of a child's development, from birth through age 21 (pre-K to 16).
4. Effective family, school, community partnerships help close achievement gaps. Disadvantaged students stand to gain the most from effective school-family-community partnerships.
5. Family-school-community partnerships benefit schools, families and communities by building capacity and providing mutual support.
6. Families can learn ways to help their children at all ages if they are provided with the opportunity, variety of choices, and necessary support.
7. The attitudes and actions of leaders support a broad "culture of learning" at school, at home and in the community. Effective family, school community partnerships are characterized by:
    - The ability to recognize strengths in all families;
    - Honesty, respect and compassion for families;
    - Cultural competence – respecting family culture, language, practices and customs;
    - Commitment to academic success and well-being of children and youth;
    - Openness to improving how schools, families and communities work together.

Implications for Practice

The recommendations below are taken from the State Board of Education's Approved Family Involvement Policy for districts and boards of education. They show how a school district may enact the guiding principles. While these examples do not cover every possible action, they provide some examples from which leaders may find ideas for local implementation.

Supporting Parent and Family Involvement in Their Child's Education

- Respect and value parents and families as children's first teachers and the primary decision-makers in children's education.*◊
- Help parents and families acquire techniques, strategies and skills by offering trainings and materials they can use to support children's at-home learning and academic success in school. *◊
- Provide parents and families with timely and meaningful information in understandable language on Ohio's academic standards; state and local assessments; and legal requirements so that they can make informed decisions about their children's academic future. These legal requirements include Title I, Section 1118; parent participation rights under IDEA; and gifted students under Ohio Revised Code (ORC) 3324.04 and 3324.06. *◊
- Collaborate with community-based programs, including health and human service providers, to ensure that the parents and families have the resources they need to be involved in their children's education, growth and development. ◊
- Coordinate and integrate parent and family involvement programs and activities into Head Start, Reading First, Early Reading First, Home Instruction Programs for Preschool Youngsters, Parents as Teachers Programs, public preschool, special education, gifted student services, parent resource centers and other community activities. *◊
- Help parents and families create supportive conditions at home that emphasize the importance of education and learning. ◊
- Build strong partnerships and assist parents and families in connecting with entities such as community-based programs, higher-education institutions, libraries and business resources to enhance students' in-school and out-of-school learning opportunities, including field-based education, internships, mentoring programs, arts and sports programs, and community service activities.
- Collaborate with health and human services agencies to provide access; coordinate support services for students, parents and families. ◊

Supporting Parent and Family Involvement in Schools

- Respect, value and involve parents and families as partners and decision-makers in the school's continuous improvement planning.
- Develop policies regarding school involvement with parents and families and distribute the policy in language they can understand. *◊
- Create parent and family engagement activities that respect various cultures, languages, practices and customs; and build relationships among parents, families and schools through bridging economic and cultural barriers. ◊Promote consistent and effective two-way communication between all students' parents, family members and school personnel. *
- Prepare parents and families to be involved in meaningful meetings and discussions with administrators, teachers and staff. *◊

- Design a range of meaningful parent involvement opportunities that reflect families' specific needs and characteristics.
- Create welcoming and supportive school environments for parents and families that are child-centered and family-strengthening.
- Provide logistical support (e.g., transportation, child care) so parents and families can participate in school-sponsored family involvement events. *
- Encourage businesses and industries to offer parent- and family-friendly policies that support parent and family involvement in children's school activities.
- Develop a comprehensive plan for engaging parents, families and community members in education, working with representatives of these groups to define research-based measurements, strategies and activities. These efforts should be incorporated into continuous improvement and school improvement plans and result in improved academic achievement.
- Evaluate annually and modify a comprehensive parent, family and community engagement plan using outcome data and input from families, students, school staff and community members.
- Dedicate fiscal, personnel, facilities and other resources to support the ongoing implementation of effective family and community engagement strategies with attention given to schools with low-achieving students.
- Designate a district position as a parent and family coordinator, advocate or ombudsman to coordinate family and community engagement strategies. The designated person should be knowledgeable in school program planning, evaluation, group facilitation, community collaboration, cultural competence and family ecology.
- Offer ongoing and systematic professional development for administrators, teachers and pupil services staff on building strong partnerships with families; the importance of reaching out to families through multiple communication pathways; designing meaningful parent conferences; and implementing and coordinating family involvement programs school-wide. *◊

Note:

◊ Indicates IDEA 2004 Sections 650 & 644 parent involvement requirements

* Indicates Title I Section 1118 parent involvement requirements