Georgia PTA®

*every*child. *one* voice.

# PARENT/FAMILY INVOLVEMENT GUIDE

**2002-2003 Edition**

**Georgia PTA**
**114 Baker Street, NE**
**Atlanta, Georgia 30308-3366**
**(404) 659-0214**
**(800) PTA-TODAY (782-8632)**
**www.georgiapta.org**

# Acknowledgements


**Augusta, Georgia**
**706-721-1828 or 1-800-733-1828**
**http://cmc.mcg.edu**

**Georgia PTA gratefully acknowledges the support of MCG Children's Medical Center in Augusta for their commitment of human and financial resources to this project.**

## 2001-2003 Georgia PTA
## Board of Directors

Shiree Lynch ..... President
Cherie Eastburn..... President Elect
Carol Talbot ..... Vice President
Susan Olson ..... Secretary
Keith Green ..... Treasurer
Pinky Gilbert..... Parliamentarian
Valerie Martin..... Immediate Past President

**District Directors**

TBA ..... 3rd District
Barbara Tolbert……..4th District
Janice Hamlin..... 5th District
Patricia West……..6th District
Bob Boyer ..... 7th District
Veronica Williams-Robinson… 8th District
Marty Berry..... 9th District
Tammy Harris ..... 10th District
Felisha Digby-Blackwell ..... 11th District
TBA ..... 12th District
Leslie Cushman..... 13th District

**Standing Committees**

Brenda Beavers..... Arts in Education
Laura Dobbs…….Bylaws
Patti DiTuri..... Communications
Susan Sipe ..... Councils
Margie Ringfield .....District Director at Large
Lynn Slaker ..... Education
Hazel Bryant.....Environment
Lynn Sanchez .....Health
Lynn McIntyre..... Legislation
Janice Satterfield ..... Membership
Patricia Copeland ..... Military Liaison
Cathy Richards .....Parent/Family Involvement
Jim Helms..... Programs
Joan Duff ..... Reflections
Jean Banister..... Youth Services

Georgia PTA
everychild. onevoice.

**114 Baker Street, NE**
**Atlanta, GA 30308-3366**
**404-659-0214**
**800-PTA-TODAY**

Dear Readers:

Georgia PTA extends its thanks to the Medical College of Georgia Children's Medical Center for the opportunity to bring this parent/family involvement guide to you.

For decades, those of us in PTA and others who work with children, like MCG Children's Medical Center, have known that children do better in school when parents are involved in their education.

Three types of parent/family involvement are critical in a young person's life:

- Parents as first educators in the home
- Parents as partners with the school
- Parents as advocates for all children and youth in society.

Academic research validates what we have always known: the greatest successes of children are gained when parents are actively involved in both learning and decision making. The education of every child depends on the important partnership between home and school.

There are fundamental principles or "givens" that underlie any successful parent involvement effort.

- Parents want the best for their children.
- Parents, regardless of ethnic group, socioeconomic status or educational background, are a key resource in their children's education.
- All children can learn.
- The focus is on the child and his or her success.
- The school is not the only entity responsible for a child's academic achievement.
- Schools, families and communities can succeed together as partners in educating children to lead healthy, happy, and productive lives.

This publication provides a wealth of information to assist parents, as well as anyone who is involved in the lives of children, to help every child succeed. I invite you to review this parent/family involvement guide and share it with others in your community.

Together we are speaking for every child with one voice.

Shiree Lynch

Shiree Lynch
President

# Contents

## Purpose

This Guidebook is designed to help parents participate in the education of their children and to reinforce good childrearing practices. It focuses on helping parents to be advocates for all children and participants in school-based decision-making. The guide also provides valuable information and strategies about helping children succeed and can be used by anyone raising or working with children.

## Acknowledgements

Georgia PTA gratefully acknowledges the support of MCG Children's Medical Center for their commitment of human and financial resources to this project.

This book has been compiled from a variety of sources. Special thanks to the American Academy of Pediatrics, *American Baby, Educational Leadership, Live and Learn and Pass It On*, by H. Jackson Brown, Jr., National PTA Website, *National PTA Involvement Kit, National PTA Today*, the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, *Parents Digest, Six Point Plan for Raising Happy, Healthy Children*, by John Rosemond, *Starting Out Right, State Education Leader, The Parents Desk Reference*, by Franck and Brownstone, U.S. Department of Education, and *Building Successful Partnerships* from the National PTA. This book has been revised since its original compilation.

## Topics

| Section | Provides |
|---|---|
| **Overview** | The purpose of this guidebook and an overview of what it contains. |
| **The PTA** | An overview of the Georgia PTA and National PTA |
| **Parent/Family Involvement Standards** | Detailed information on the six National PTA Standards for Parent/Family Involvement. |
| **How to Help Your Child Succeed** | Ten Ways to Help Your Child Succeed. |
| **No Child Left Behind** | Federal Education Initiative |
| **Parent Involvement Schools of Excellence** | Program to assess parent involvement practices at your school |
| **Resources and References** | Georgia PTA Cooperating Agencies and On-line Resources |

## Audiences

The guide will be helpful to:

- Parents
- Local Unit PTAs
- School Administrators
- Teachers
- Community Leaders
- Faith Organizations
- Business Partners
- Child Care Providers

## The National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs

**Standard I:** **Communicating** - Communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful.

**Standard II:** **Parenting** - Parenting skills are promoted and supported.

**Standard III:** **Student Learning** - Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.

**Standard IV:** **Volunteering** - Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought.

**Standard V:** **School Decision Making and Advocacy** - Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families.

**Standard VI:** **Collaborating with Community** - Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families, and student learning.

## Estándard Nacional para los Programas de Participación de Padres y Madres de Familia

**Criterio I:** **La Comunicación** – La comunicación entre la familia y la escuela es bilateral, significativa y continua.

**Criterio II:** **La Crianza de Los Hijos** – Se formentan y se apoyan las tecnicas de la crianza de los niños.

**Criterio III:** **El Aprendizaje** – La ayuda de los padres es esencial para el aprendizaje del niño.

**Criterio IV:** **El Uso de Voluntarios** – Los padres de los alumos son bienvenidos a la escuela, y se invita su apoyo y ayuda.

**Criterio V:** **La Toma de Decisiones y Promoción** – La familia participa plenamente en las decisiones que afectan a sus hijos.

**Criterio VI:** **Colaboración Con La Comunidad** – Los recursos comunitarios sirven para fortalecer las escuelas y las familias y el aprendizaje estudiantil.

# Facts about the National PTA

No two parent committees or groups are ever the same. Each has to adapt its own concepts and ideas. One influential parent group in the United States is the National PTA. National PTA members include parents, teachers, students, and other child advocates. The following information about the National PTA will give you ideas about how influential parent groups can be and how varied the areas of influence can be. The following information has been condensed from its original version as seen on the National PTA Web Site, www.pta.org.

### Mission

National PTA – the nation's largest child advocacy organization with more than 6 million members – speaks for every child with one voice. All PTAs work to advance our longtime mission:

- To support and speak on behalf of children and youth in the schools, in the community, and before governmental bodies and other organizations that make decisions affecting children;
- To assist parents in developing the skills they need to raise and protect their children; and
- To encourage parent and public involvement in the public schools of this nation.

### Membership

PTA's membership is open to anyone who is concerned with the education, health, and welfare of children and youth. In fact, National PTA was founded more than 100 years ago on the premise that membership should be open to all people – regardless of color, creed, or condition.

### Structure

The PTA is a grassroots membership organization. Our 54 state-level congresses serve PTAs in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Department of Defense schools in Europe and the Pacific. State PTAs charter and oversee local units and function as independent affiliates of National PTA.

### A Century of Commitment for Children

Throughout PTA's history, we have championed social, health, safety, and education issues affecting children and youth.

- 1900s Juvenile Justice & Child Labor Laws
- 1910s Establishment of Kindergarten
- 1920s Nationwide Children's Health Project
- 1930s Nutrition & Emergency Services
- 1940s School Lunch Program
- 1950s Salk Polio Vaccine Trials
- 1960s Child Protection & Toy Safety Legislation
- 1970s Television & Media Violence
- 1980s HIV/AIDS Education Program
- 1990s TV Ratings/National Education Goals
- 2000s Parent Involvement Schools of Excellence

National PTA has never been shy to tackle tough issues – from talking about sex education as early as 1916 to supporting HIV/AIDS education programs in the 1980s, National PTA has been there to help parents and teachers be partners in children's education.

## Legislative Advocacy Activities

Some highlights of National PTA's legislative advocacy activities over the past few decades include the following:

- In 1985, National PTA helped secure passage of the 21-year-old drinking age. PTA remains active in supporting responsible alcohol advertising and a prohibition on targeting ads to those under the age of 21.
- In 1994 we supported firearms legislation including the Brady Bill and a ban on the transport of automatic weapons.
- In 1997, National PTA succeeded in getting content information included in TV ratings system.
- In 1998, National PTA helped secure funding for E-rate, which provides schools and libraries with discounted access to educational materials based on need. And in 2000, we attended a White House event on the "digital divide," highlighting the importance of closing the technology gap in our nation's schools.
- In 1998, National PTA and the National School Boards Association spearheaded a grassroots media campaign opposing vouchers. Materials included an organizing packet and camera-ready ads that could be used by state, district, and local PTAs.
- In 2000, National PTA provided comment to the FCC Commission on the proposed Children's Television Programming rule.
- Other legislative efforts include long-term campaigns to improve Title I services, IDEA programs, child labor, child nutrition, and environmental issues (asbestos was an issue in the early 1990's).
- PTA continues to fight for money for smaller class size initiatives, school-based before- and after- school care programs, and other child-related services.
- PTA actively worked to secure passage of the Family and Medical Leave Act, a bill that allows employees to take unpaid leave to care for a new child or sick family member. National PTA continues to work for expansion of family leave to allow for unpaid leave for volunteering in your child's school.
- PTA initiated the Parent Act that was incorporated into the reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act (also known as No Child Left Behind). These provisions expand parent participation in decision-making committees, ensure that parent involvement practices are evaluated for effectiveness, and that states and districts give assistance to schools having difficulty implementing parent involvement policies.
- In 2000, National PTA published the book *Building Successful Partnerships: A Guide to Parent and Family Involvement Programs.* It provides field-tested strategies for developing successful parent involvement programs.

## Resources

Working in collaboration with many national education, health, safety and child advocacy groups and federal agencies, National PTA develops and offers a wide range of programs and resources to its members. Additionally, resources, training, and services are provided to PTA members through our network of state and local PTAs, as well as through an annual convention, national magazine, publications, and website. National PTA resources are designed to support the organization's initiatives and prepare members to become advocates for all children.

# Facts about the Georgia PTA

Founded in 1906, the Georgia PTA serves as the connecting link between the national organization and over 365,000 PTA members in more than 850 local units within our state. Georgia PTA and its local units are vital links, bringing together the whole community – parents, educators, businesses and students – to ensure that all children have the best chance to become healthy, productive citizens.

Georgia PTA speaks on behalf of the children and youth in schools, in the community, and before governmental bodies and other organizations that make decisions affecting children. Georgia PTA is proud to put its volunteer strength behind programs and projects aimed at creating a better life for every child. For almost a century Georgia PTA has played an integral role in establishing, maintaining and safeguarding programs and policies that promote the health, safety, nutrition, welfare, protection, and education of *every***child** in the state.

Among our efforts, we strive to ensure:

- *every***child** has a parent/family member who is actively engaged in his or her life and education.
- *every***child** has a safe place to be before and after school.
- *every***child** has the opportunity to learn in a classroom that isn't overcrowded.
- *every***child** is provided an equitable and excellent public education.
- *every***child** has equal access to computer literacy at school.
- *every***child** is assured that his or her school is safe and drug-free.

### How to Contact Georgia PTA

| | |
|---|---|
| Address: | 114 Baker Street, NE |
| | Atlanta, GA 30308-3366 |
| Phone: | 1-800-PTA-TODAY |
| | (404) 659-0214 |
| Fax: | (404) 525-0210 |
| Email: | gapta@bellsouth.net |
| Internet: | www.georgiapta.org |
| Hours: | Monday-Friday 9:00AM-4:30PM |

### The Purposes of the PTA

The Mission of the Georgia PTA mirrors the long time mission of National PTA to be a powerful voice for children, a relevant resource for parents, and a strong advocate for public education.

The Purposes of PTA are to:

- promote the welfare of children and youth in home, school, community and place of worship;
- raise the standards of home life;
- secure adequate laws for the care and protection of children;
- bring into closer relation the home and the school so that parents and teachers may cooperate intelligently in the education of children and youth; and
- develop united efforts between educators and the general public that will secure the highest advantages in physical, mental, social and spiritual education for all children and youth.

## History

National PTA was founded in 1897 by Alice McClellan Birney and Phoebe Apperson Hearst. Mrs. Birney, a Marietta, Georgia native, began the Georgia PTA in 1906.

In 1919, the Georgia PTA helped Selena Sloan Butler establish the Georgia Congress of Colored Parents and Teachers, and in 1925 she worked with National PTA to form the National Congress of Colored Parents and Teachers. Created for children and parents whose schools were segregated by law, the sister groups worked closely together. In 1970, as desegregation began unification, the two organizations merged to become the National PTA as we know it today.

As Mrs. Birney and Mrs. Butler are from Georgia, many consider our state the cradle of the parent involvement movement.

## Priorities and Accomplishments

PTA priorities cover all areas affecting the safety, education and well being of children and families, including:

- Parent/Family Involvement
- Legislation and Advocacy
- Cultural Arts and Arts in Education
- Quality TV and Media
- Health and Nutrition
- Educational Enrichment and Curriculum
- Environment and Energy
- Reading and Literacy
- Child Abuse Prevention
- Special Education and Exceptional Children
- Parent Education and Training
- Building Successful Partnerships and Community Collaboration
- Child Safety
- Drug Abuse and Underage Drinking Prevention
- Scholarships and Grants
- Character Education

The Georgia PTA provides a unified voice speaking on behalf of children and youth before state policy-makers. In recent years, the Georgia PTA has been instrumental in:

- securing a graduated teenage driver's license program
- promoting parental involvement in the schools through local school councils
- establishing keg registration procedures aimed at reducing underage drinking
- passing Amendment 2 to allow Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) for school construction funding
- securing funding for health care providers in schools
- encouraging early childhood education

**National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Standard I:** | **Communicating** - Communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful. |
| **Standard II:** | **Parenting** - Parenting skills are promoted and supported. |
| **Standard III:** | **Student Learning** - Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning. |
| **Standard IV:** | **Volunteering** - Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought. |
| **Standard V:** | **School Decision Making and Advocacy** - Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families. |
| **Standard VI:** | **Collaborating with Community** - Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families, and student learning. |

## Why National Standards?

Over 30 years' research has proven beyond dispute the positive connection between parent* involvement and student success. Effectively engaging parents and families in the education of their children has the potential to be far more transformational than any other type of education reform.

The National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs and their quality indicators are research based and grounded in both sound philosophy and practical experience. The purpose of the standards is threefold:

- To promote meaningful parent and family participation
- To raise awareness regarding the components of effective parent/family involvement programs
- To provide guidelines for schools** that wish to improve their programs

The program standards are guidelines for leaders of institutions with programs serving parents and families. Therefore, the intended audience includes principals, administrators, educators, and parents who are in positions to influence and improve parent involvement programs. When the standards are used as guidelines, they can direct leaders as they move from discussion to action in developing dynamic programs to improve student achievement through parent involvement. As with any effective long-term reform, the overall integration and implementation of standards should be based on local needs and circumstances.

The Georgia PTA Parent/Family Involvement Guide used these national standards to organize and develop the content contained in this guide. The national standards served as guidelines for the content of this Parent/Family Involvement Guide in hopes of increasing public knowledge of the standards, as well as providing illustrative information to help explain and illustrate the standards to parents.

* Throughout this document are references to "parent" involvement. All such references may be interpreted broadly to include adults who play an important role in a child's family life, since other adults (grandparents, aunts, uncles, foster parents, guardians) may carry the primary responsibility for a child's education, development, and well-being.

** Throughout this document are references to "schools." All such references may be broadly interpreted to include other programs that serve children and families, i.e., other academic, specialty, or community programs.

## Communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful.

Communication is the foundation of a solid partnership. When parents and educators communicate effectively, positive relationships develop, problems are more easily solved, and students make greater progress.

Too often school or program communication is one-way without the chance to exchange ideas and share perceptions. Effective home-school communication is the two-way sharing of information vital to student success. Even parent-teacher conferences can be one-way if the goal is merely reporting student progress. Partnering requires give-and-take conversation, goal setting for the future, and regular follow-up interactions.

***To evaluate successful School – Home Communications, ask "How well do we…":***

1. Use a variety of communication tools on a regular basis, seeking to facilitate two-way interaction through each type of medium.
2. Establish opportunities for parents and educators to share partnering information such as student strengths and learning preferences.
3. Provide clear information regarding course expectations and offerings, student placement, school activities, student services, and optional programs.
4. Mail report cards and regular progress reports to parents. Provide support services and follow-up conferences as needed.
5. Disseminate information on school reforms, policies, discipline procedures, assessment tools, and school goals, and include parents in any related decision-making process.
6. Conduct conferences with parents at least twice a year, with follow-up as needed. These should accommodate the varied schedules of parents, language barriers, and the need for childcare.
7. Encourage immediate contact between parents and teachers when concerns arise.
8. Distribute student work for parental comment and review on a regular basis.
9. Translate communications to assist non-English speaking parents.
10. Communicate with parents regarding positive student behavior and achievement, not just regarding misbehavior or failure.
11. Provide opportunities for parents to communicate with principals and other administrative staff.
12. Promote informal activities at which parents, staff, and community members can interact.
13. Provide staff development regarding effective communication techniques and the importance of regular two-way communication between the school and the family.

# Tips for Standard I - Communicating

## Program Orientation

At the beginning of the school or program year, offer orientation sessions that include the following:

- Course or program expectations and goals
- Developmental and skills information
- Information on how/when to contact program staff or administration
- Process for handling program questions/concerns
- Strategies to support learning at home
- Testing/assessment information and procedures

Always include a time for questions and answers to address specific parent or family concerns. If possible, provide a video recording of the event to share with those who are unable to attend.

## Building the Home-School Connection

With so many students, how can educators build effective partnerships with each of their parents? One teacher sets aside 10 minutes a day to telephone, e-mail, or send postcards to parents. Consequently, once a month the teacher is able to make at least two contacts with each family represented in the class. Most conversations focus on student successes and upcoming activities for parents and families. Because of the consistent contact and accessibility, parents are more eager to respond and support student/class goals.

Create class or program newsletters for parents that contain tips for helping children learn in the home, fun activities to do as a family, and other useful ideas.

Sponsor programs or community events that allow educators and parents to interact on a social basis in addition to standard parent/teacher conferences.

Develop a parent handbook.

Hold a new student breakfast for all students and their families who enroll after the start of school year. This is a great time to provide orientation for parents.

## Best Ideas from Teachers

***Communication All Year!*** Parents fill out an "interest and skills" inventory at the start of each year. I then put them in a binder and refer to it often – tapping parent assistance for special units/lessons. A class web site helps working parents feel a part of weekly events and provides an e-mail option for busy schedules. Keeping photos going home all year helps to break down barriers so that when parents do come in they have a visual to provide a comfort zone. I take their pictures at events, on trips, and when volunteering so that a fond memory is created. This makes them feel important and more comfortable the next time they volunteer. Everyone wants to feel valued so thank-you notes for all deeds, big or small are quite necessary! *From Michele Myers, Grade 3, Chalker Elementary School, Kennesaw*

***Making sure phone contacts have a positive tone,*** even when reporting problems. If the nature of the contact is negative, be sure to say something positive about the student. Assure the parent you are calling out of concern for their child and thank them for their support. *From Linda Henninger, Grades 9-12, North Springs High School, Roswell*

At the beginning of the year, I ask my parents to ***write me a letter telling me about their child.*** I want to know their learning style, interests, history, hopes, and desires for their future. (Letter may be shared upon request.) *From Leah Gourley, Grade 5, Mountain Road Elementary, Woodstock*

***I set up and maintain a web page where I keep a current list of all assignments, test dates, projects, etc. for all of my classes.*** In addition, parents and/or students may communicate with me via this web page. This enables parents to always know what is going on in class, as well as what upcoming assignments are due. It also allows parents to remain involved in their children's progress, ask questions, send comments, let me know when a child will be absent, etc. *From Denise Facey, Grades 9-12 Woodstock High School, Woodstock*

***A bilingual parent pack goes home with each child every Friday.*** (41% of our population is Hispanic, so all newsletters are translated). Bilingual letters from the principal and teacher are included in each parent pack each week. At each PTA meeting we give tickets to each adult present, then we give away free bags of groceries to the ticket holders of ticket numbers drawn from a hat. (81% of our population qualifies for free and reduced lunch so this is very popular.) Publix, our Partner in Education, provides the groceries. A bilingual monthly school calendar is sent home in parent packs at the beginning of each month so parents will know about school events in advance. Students have agendas for daily communication between home and school. *From Teachers of Lee Roy Tippens Elementary School, Canton*

Many parents support and are involved in the school behind the scenes through fund raising, helping students, and other activities even when they work or have other responsibilities and cannot be physically on the school campus. One of the ways that I encourage goodwill, support, and cooperation from parents is ***to use a digital camera to take pictures of my students involved in class activities. I then e-mail the pictures to parents.*** They are thrilled and delighted. This increases their willingness to support the school and what we're trying to accomplish with their children. Many of these photos even go around the world to family members and friends. It's a great tool for building goodwill in the community! *From Eulousie Williams, Grades 5 & 6, AIM, Cherokee County Schools*

***Always keep the communication line between home and school open.*** Regular communication can be maintained by sending home weekly folders of graded student work, as well as any school or classroom news. Invite parents to all school and classroom functions. When conducting parent conferences, always remember to be positive and tactful. Plan lessons which actively involve parents and students. Invite parents to come in and see their child in a classroom setting. Some examples are presenting an oral report, demonstrating a science project, or acting in a school play. Parent volunteers can be an asset to the classroom. These are things I use and have found success with. An open communication line allows parents and teachers to become companions in learning. *From Patsy Jordan, Grade 4, Clayton Elementary School, Canton*

## A Guide to Parent/Teacher Conferences

A parent-teacher partnership is needed for a child to have a happy and productive school experience. A parent/teacher conference is one way to accomplish this partnership. It is a two-way exchange of information about a child that facilitates effective communication. A successful parent/teacher conference should reinforce the parent's feeling of playing an important role in the child's education and training.

The teacher and parents are a team working for the child. The teacher and the parents have much in common. They both believe that each child is different, and they want each child to succeed by achieving his/her greatest potential. Both want the child's home and school environment to compliment one another, and both want learning to occur in both environments. The teacher and the parents have the same governing goal, the best education for a child. Parents and teachers are partners in an important venture, the education of a child. Like any joint venture, communication and discussion are important in facilitating a successful outcome. A parent/teacher conference is one means used by schools to give parents and teachers an opportunity to meet in person to discuss a child's education.

The following is a list of important information parents can obtain from a child's teacher during a parent/teacher conference:

- Suggestions the parent can use at home to help the child succeed in school
- Individual strengths and weaknesses of the child in academic subject areas
- How much effort the child has put forth in class
- An explanation of any ability groupings and their child's placement within these groups
- The social progress of the child
- Clarification of classroom rules and policies
- An explanation of standardized test results
- Samples of the child's work

Parents can also give important information to teachers to aid in the education of their individual child. Some examples of information that would enable the teacher to work more effectively with a child include any special needs or health considerations of a child, after school activities, interests, hobbies, and a student's perceptions about school.

### After the Conference Is Over:

- Write down the important points discussed.
- Be sure you know what action is to be performed by the parent and/or the teacher to initiate follow-up and continuity.
- Discuss the conference with your child, stressing the positive points, giving praise for success, and discussing areas needing improvement.
- Remember to check back with the teacher on the agreed upon date to find out how the child has progressed since the conference.
- Send a note of thanks to the teacher.

## Parenting skills are promoted and supported.

Parents are a child's life support system. Consequently, the most important support a child can receive comes from the home.

School personnel and program staff support positive parenting by respecting and affirming the strengths and skills needed by parents to fulfill their role. From making sure that students arrive at school rested, fed, and ready to learn, to setting high learning expectations and nurturing self-esteem, parents sustain their children's learning.

When staff members recognize parent roles and responsibilities, ask parents what supports they need, and work to find ways to meet those needs, they communicate a clear message to parents: "We value you and need your input" in order to maintain a high-quality program.

***To evaluate successful programs, ask "How well do we…":***

1. Communicate the importance of positive relationships between parents and their children.
2. Link parents to programs and resources within the community that provide support services to families.
3. Reach out to all families, not just those who attend parent meetings.
4. Establish policies that support and respect family responsibilities, recognizing the variety of parenting traditions and practices within the community's cultural and religious diversity.
5. Provide an accessible parent/family information and resource center to support parents and families with training, resources, and other services.
6. Encourage staff members to demonstrate respect for families and the family's primary role in the rearing of children to become responsible adults.

# Tips for Standard II – Parenting

## Respecting Diverse Family Cultures and Traditions

Quality schools and programs must be culturally sensitive to increasingly diverse student and family populations. Appreciating the traditions of families from various cultures requires, first of all, an awareness and acceptance of their differences.

Find ways to help parents and families value and share their distinctiveness. Cultural fairs or other opportunities to celebrate specific ethnic holidays or traditions may help parents and family members develop a sense of belonging and ownership in the school and community. Making resources available in the parents' first language remains critical in responding to the needs and concerns of the parents and families served.

## Parent and Family Resource Centers

Designate an area in your school or community for parents and family members to call their own. The "center" should be tailored to respond to the issues and concerns of your school or program members.

The center's function could vary from providing an informal gathering place for parents to share information, to providing comprehensive access to community services. A wide array of family resource and support materials including videos, brochures, and other publications are often included. Some centers have expanded to provide parenting workshops, toy-lending libraries, or English as a Second Language (ESL) classes.

Highlighting "what's new at the family center" in each school newsletter and sponsoring family or education events at the center throughout the year helps to increase the center's visibility and effectiveness.

## Best Ideas

I have held ***monthly family sessions***. At the first meeting, I have the parents come and tell me issues they'd like to discuss. Every month we all get together, without the children, and brainstorm and share ideas that have worked for us. I share educational data on the topic first and then turn it over to the parents. I do not contribute except for acting as a facilitator. The topics have been issues such as sibling rivalry, getting my child to bed, how to get homework finished, encouraging responsibility and even, "my child is driving me crazy." The parents are very talkative and have great ideas. The camaraderie is amazing to watch. I wish I had a dollar for every parent that has said, "Hey, I've never thought of that. I think I'll try it!" *From Adrienne Horne, Grades 4 & 5, Harmony Elementary School, Buford*

Sponsor parenting classes or hold an annual "parent university" in cooperation with local professionals. Provide baby-sitting services if possible.

Start a toy-lending library.

Start a parent book club. Advertise the current selection, then hold parent meetings to discuss them, or include commentary in the school newsletter.

Host activities at the school that bring parents and children together, such as a "lunch buddies" program where parents drop in to eat lunch with their children.

Create "Together Grams," a half-sheet flier with one activity or idea for parents to do with their children, e.g., "talk to your children about when you were their age." On the back, provide information on why the activity is valuable and how it supports learning.

Construct a web site for your PTA and include parenting information and links to parenting sites, including National PTA's web site.

## Excerpts from *The Nurturant Dad*

*by Phyllis M. McNeal*

Recently, interest has increased in the role of the father in his children's development. In light of the current events in American life, the very basics of parenting are being examined in an effort to create a better future for our children. In the past, primary interest had been focused on the mother-child relationship without looking at the effects of fatherhood.

Fatherhood has evolved into a complex and very unique job but a very special one with serious consequences regarding the emotional and intellectual growth of children. Fathering is one of the most important and one of the most difficult roles a man will ever have but most men become fathers with only a very basic understanding of what is expected. What being a father means is a big mystery to most men. They are not prepared and no one talks about it.

### What Traditional Roles Have Fathers Played?

Traditionally, fathers were seen as stoic, brave, silent, and known for keeping an emotional distance. Fathers were known as protector, provider, as being responsible, dependable, hard-working and problem-solving. The father's job was to expand his children's horizon beyond the inner circle of the family and the mother-child relationship.

- As *PROTECTOR*, a father ensures his family that he will not allow any outside force to enter the family and cause harm whether this is physical, emotional or psychological.
- As *PROVIDER*, a father provides for the material well-being of the family. Traditionally, he has been responsible for everything the family buys. Children see daddy as the reason for their having toys and other materials.
- As a *RESPONSIBLE PERSON*, he is seen as the person in the family who sets the moral tone for the family. He is often seen as the disciplinarian and many wives make daddy the "heavy" by saying, "Wait 'til daddy comes home."
- As a *DEPENDABLE PERSON*, he is seen as the one to attend baseball games, to teach the children how to ride bikes, to help make a science project, or who can be counted on to provide the money for a new car or a college education.
- As a *HARD-WORKING PERSON*, dad is seen as the one who traditionally comes home tired and perhaps late or who has two jobs to make sure that the family has what it needs.

There is a more modern concept of fatherhood. Men are struggling to learn how to maintain and nurture a connection to their children. We need to begin to redefine fathering in a way that makes sense so we can provide the reassuring comfort and strength that fathers need.

### Who Is Father?

Fatherhood will remain to be some of the traditional things and more. We must now look at the new NURTURANT DAD.

The NURTURANT DAD is one who has learned to harness the energy he has and understand what he is feeling and why he is experiencing those particular feelings. He has learned how to describe and communicate his feelings in a way that others understand. He realizes that this is important in building a strong and lasting connection to his children.

Men have been taught to retreat into themselves when things are difficult. Connecting with children makes men very vulnerable. The NURTURANT DAD recognizes that he must allow himself to become more vulnerable for the sake of his children. Love for his children will allow him to become vulnerable. Men often have difficulty in finding the words that describe the love they have so they resist talking about it. The NURTURANT DAD recognizes his need to talk to others in an effort to be able to communicate his feeling and express them to his children.

The NURTURANT DAD is comfortable enough with his own emotions that he is able to nurture and receive the feelings of his children.

Fathers parent differently than mothers do. Mothers need to step back enough to allow their children to grow and develop. Fathers need to move close enough to their children to build a strong and lasting bond. The NURTURANT DAD realizes that fathering on a day-to-day basis is almost exclusively about feeling.

Men have begun to recognize that everything they do and say as well as everything they FORGET to do or are unable to say will leave a deep impression on their children. Impatience is seen as raging anger, irritation as a serious rage, and being busy as a lack of caring. The NURTURANT DAD is mindful of these impressions.

The NURTURANT DAD is very clear about who he is and what his own needs are. He realizes that his children cannot live his dreams and that he cannot and should not burden his children with his expectations. Children should not have to try to fit the mold that their dad created but should be able to develop into the people they truly are.

Together with and through his children, the NURTURANT DAD knows that he can open himself to discovery, to learn and to expand appreciation of those who are different. Children constantly stretch our boundaries and contribute to our growth.

The NURTURANT DAD becomes the window of the world for his children so that they can discover all of the exciting and wonderful things which await them in the real world.

## What Do Fathers Do?

- Fathers tend to play with their children more. They are funny and a lot more physical than moms. These differences mean a lot to the development of children.
- Fathers are giants to their children. They are strong and tall and have deep voices. There isn't anything they can't do or don't know about. Children look to them as a source of strength.
- Children feel safe and secure when they know that daddy is there for them and that tomorrow brings a promise of a new and exciting adventure.
- Father's playful style teaches children how to have emotional self-control and enables children to develop and maintain satisfying relationships later in life.
- Fathers are often called upon to provide discipline. This is one of the more difficult aspects of fathering but can be done effectively if it is firm and consistent.
- Fathers need to make children feel that they are a special part of their lives and so they will always have room in their lives for their children.
- Fathers are the ones who encourage their children to take risks and enable children to have new experiences. It is these actions which allow children to grow into self-confident adults.
- From the time children are born, they are absorbing everything that their parents provide. The stimulation that fathers provide for children is not only enjoyable but absolutely necessary for their children's intellectual, physical and emotional growth.
- Fathers enable their children to develop a whole host of communicative skills through interactive play.

Today, fatherhood is much tougher and more demanding than at any other historical period. The role of the nurturant dad allows for men to share in their children's growth and development alongside the moms. It is certainly much more of a challenge but also one of the most rewarding and fulfilling experiences that any man could have.

## Yours, Ours and Mine: Making Stepfamilies Work

*by Lynn Viale*

The honeymoon is over. Now it's just you and your spouse and the stepchild who sits staring suspiciously at you across the breakfast table. Sometimes, as you attempt to merge "yours" and "mine" into "ours," the problems seem overwhelming. But, whether your stepchildren live with you or are just visiting, it is possible to ease this transition from strangers to family.

John Rosemond, a columnist who lives in Gastonia, North Carolina, identifies two types of stepfamilies: primary, in which the parent has primary custody of the children, and secondary, in which the children visit, but do not live with, the parent.

### Steps for Permanent Stepchildren

Is your stepchild a permanent member of your household? If so, try these five steps to stepfamily success.

**1. Establish marriage as the center of the family**. "The primary stepfamily faces a set of problems that are different from those faced by the traditional family," according to Rosemond, author of Parent Power. "The biggest hurdle involves the need to establish the marriage as the center of the family." "The marriage must be the most important relationship in the family," he said. "Stepfamilies are no different from other families in this respect."

Children may complain about their central position being usurped, particularly if they and their biological parent had close relationships when they were a single-parent family. However, they will eventually discover that their own sense of security, in fact, is strengthened when the marriage is strong.

**2. Allow for differences while building your own family traditions.** In trying to blend different backgrounds, histories and life-styles, conflicts will certainly arise. Alice, whose 11 year-old daughter, Tammy, has lived with her for the past two years, said, "I wish Tammy liked camping, hiking and picnicking. But she doesn't. Tammy wishes I liked shopping and catching the latest movie releases. But I don't. So we accept those differences and find our own common ground elsewhere." Alice and Tammy cook together, take long walks at sunset, and Alice has recently begun teaching Tammy how to operate her camera. While still maintaining their differences, Alice and Tammy are beginning to develop their own traditions and are building a history together. A photo album is a great way to chronicle these new family traditions.

**3. Hold family meetings.** Meeting with their parents, children need a chance to vent their frustrations, to plan family entertainment and vacations and to help find solutions to family problems. These meetings don't have to be held at a specific place and time. When the atmosphere is relaxed and talk is easy, you can begin tossing ideas back and forth.

Linda Craven, author of *Stepfamilies: New Patterns in Harmony*, emphasizes the importance of these family meetings: "Many stepfamilies have regular meetings to discuss such things as curfews, chores and allowances. Everyone gets a chance to say how he or she thinks things should be done. And everyone feels more cooperative for having worked out a plan together."

**4. Send positive signals.** Through words and actions, you can reach out to your stepchild. Maybe a kiss or hug isn't acceptable at this time, but a hand on the shoulder can say, "I care about you." Praise will also make children feel better about themselves and will encourage them to do what you ask. Did your stepson dart outside without slamming the door this time? Did he really study for that history test and bring his grade up to a B? Remember to praise him for it.

**5. Don't try to replace a biological parent.** Just in case you forget that you're not the "real" parent, your stepchild will remind you with the standard stepchild refrain, "I don't have to mind you! You're not my real mother (father)!" You can be many things to your stepchild other than parent; authority figure, certainly; but also an older friend, confidante, listener-to-tales, and sharer of secrets. And sometimes, you can just be the person that child needs to talk to, when a parent simply won't do.

Emily Visher, co-founder of the Stepfamily Association of America, and author of *How To Win As A Stepfamily*, feels stepparents play a very special role in the lives of their stepchildren. "When children have permission to care about all the adults in their lives, it adds richness and variety to their existence. Each adult has something unique to give a child whether it is a joyful sense of humor, the talent to tell a good bedtime story, or the ability to share the child's feelings."

## When Stepchildren Visit

Is your stepchild a visiting member of your household? Secondary stepfamilies, too, can take steps to assist them in their journey from strangers to family.

**1. Give the children a place of their own.** Whether it's a room or simply a portion of the family bulletin board, children need to know that there is some space in the house that's only theirs. Jim and Donna's 5-year-old daughter, Jessica, eagerly anticipates sharing her room with her 9-year-old half-sister, Marilyn, on alternate weekends, during school holidays and for a month in the summer. Even at this young age, Jessica understands that one drawer and a small portion of the closet in the room are not hers. They belong exclusively to Marilyn. And Marilyn knows that the clothes, books and games that she leaves behind will be untouched when she returns.

**2. Give responsibility.** Donna realized the importance of making the visiting stepchild feel like part of the family. Is the stepdaughter who's spending every other weekend with you a guest or a resident? She really falls into neither category. Giving the child responsibilities will make her a contributing member of the household. Picking up after herself, helping with meal preparation and cleanup, and making her bed will send a clear message that she is at home and not a guest in a hotel. This will also benefit the other members of the family because the responsibility of cooking, cleaning and caring for the household will be shared. However, it is confusing for a child to live under two sets of rules. Much confusion can be eliminated if you have simple written chore and rule lists for the children to follow.

**3. Establish the same age appropriate rules for all the children.** It is easy for a parent to be more lenient with the visiting biological child than with those children who live in the house full-time. "After all," the parent rationalizes, "we have so little time together, I don't want to have to spend it criticizing." If your husband's resident daughter has to go to bed at 10 p.m. on weekends, is it fair for your visiting son to have the privilege of staying up until midnight? If your resident children have to make their beds and clean their rooms, is it fair for his visiting son to be exempt from these duties? Whatever age appropriate rules you establish for the children in your home, be consistent with all children, biological and step, visiting and resident.

**4. Mentally prepare yourself for the child's arrival.** Donna said she's found it useful before Marilyn arrives to use mental imagery. "I picture myself laughing with her, playing with her, enjoying our time together," she said. "Sometimes reality misses this mark, but more often than not, when I've envisioned a great weekend, we have a great weekend." What problems recur whenever your stepchildren come to visit? With resident children, as one harried stepmother explained, "when you're in the midst of family problems, there is not much time for reflection." With visiting children, you have the advantage of time between visits to find objective solutions to recurring problems.

# Discipline: A Parent's Guide

Discipline is not the same as punishment. Instead of punishment, children need to be taught what behavior is allowed or not allowed and why. Therefore, parents should stress "do's" rather than "don'ts," and praise their children when they behave well or accomplish a goal or task. An example of positive discipline would be telling your son, "Please pick your clothes up off the floor because I have to vacuum in here," rather than saying, "Don't throw your clothes on the floor anymore!"

Studies have shown that physical punishment, such as hitting and slapping, and verbal abuse are not effective discipline. While such punishment may seem to get fast results in specific instances, it is generally more harmful than helpful over a long period of time. Physical punishment can demoralize and humiliate children, causing them to develop low self-esteem. Some experts argue that it also promotes physical aggression in children by showing them that violence is acceptable.

## Parents And School Discipline

The discipline that children learn at home is the foundation for their behavior at school. School discipline is merely an extension of home discipline. Thus, parents should view a discipline problem in school as a home problem, too. If your child's teacher reports a discipline problem, talk with your child and the teacher, and work on a solution together. A good example is homework. If a teacher says that a child is not completing homework or is not doing it satisfactorily, parents need to supervise the homework more closely. Homework both encourages and reflects the development of self-discipline and good work habits.

Parents should support the school's rules. Just as at home, classrooms and schools must have established rules of conduct. Studies have shown that the most effective schools are those where students help set the rules and where students are encouraged to be self-disciplined. Children should know that their parents expect them to follow school rules and that they should not violate those rules.

Poorly developed rules and inconsistent enforcement causes discipline problems. In school, as at home, the most effective rules are those decided on by everyone and enforced by all. Some guidelines for developing a few such rules are listed below.

## Guidelines For Rules:

- Abide by the rules yourself. Children learn more by how parents act than by what they say. For example, if you want to teach your child that physically aggressive behavior is not the way to resolve conflicts or problems, then do not resort to physical punishment yourself.
- Set limits on behavior, but be careful not to impose too many rules. Before making a rule, ask yourself: Is it necessary? Possible criteria could be: Does the rule protect a child's health and safety? Does it protect the rights or property of others?
- Do not be afraid to praise a child for good behavior and accomplishments. Let the child know you appreciate his/her efforts.
- Take time to listen to your child, especially if there is a problem or the child wants to discuss a rule.
- Involve your child as much as possible in making family rules and decisions. Children are less likely to break rules that they have helped to establish.
- Be consistent. Agree with your spouse on methods of discipline. Consistency reinforces the importance of a rule, and a child can always predict the results if he/she does not follow the rule.
- Act quickly when a child misbehaves, and always make sure the child knows what he/she did wrong. Do not let a problem or worry build up over a period of time or allow time for the child to forget what he/she did to misbehave.
- Be flexible and willing to change rules as they are no longer needed. Some rules may work when a child is young, but as he/she gets older, they may need or want more independence.

- Create rules that help your child develop inner control.
- Make sure your child understands the rules and the penalties for breaking them.
- Give your child responsibilities, including household chores. Having a chore to do can help children achieve independence and develop high self-esteem.
- Avoid criticism and nagging.
- Avoid power struggles with your child. Discipline is not a game in which there is a winner and a loser. You expect cooperation from your child, and your child expects you to be fair. Respect your child enough to allow disagreement at times.
- Keep your sense of humor.
- Treat your child in the same manner as your friends, with love, respect, and courtesy.

## Ways to Provide Age-Appropriate Boundaries for Children

Not all boundaries or rules are appropriate for all ages of children. Listed below is a guide to what is appropriate for infants, toddlers, young children, and elementary school age children as shown in *Starting Out Right* (1997), which is a Search Institute Report.

| Age | Practical age-appropriate ideas |
|---|---|
| 0-1 | * Understand that children at this age do not intentionally violate standards.<br>* Distract children from inappropriate behavior and draw attention to appropriate behavior.<br>* Encourage children to try new skills without pushing. |
| 1-2 | * Expose children to other children their age but do not expect them to play together.<br>* Give simple, understandable boundaries, such as “Don’t bite” or “Be quiet.”<br>* Enforce boundaries consistently so children learn them more easily. |
| 3-5 | * Demonstrate appropriate behaviors; do not just tell children what to do or not to do.<br>* Be calm when children act out in highly emotional ways.<br>* Encourage children to play with one other child on a regular basis to learn social skills. |
| 6-11 | * Be firm about safety boundaries.<br>* Encourage schools, families, and communities to have consistent boundaries and consequences.<br>* Be consistent with the consequences for violating boundaries. |

## You Say "Yes", I Say "No": Negotiating with Your Child

*by Irene C. Beck*

Have you ever tried to put a stubborn 2-year-old into a car seat? Have you tried to persuade a 10-year-old that pantyhose and eye shadow are unsuitable for her? What about your teenager? Does he or she buck you on just about everything? If so, then you know firsthand that negotiating is as big a part of a parent's job as nurturing.

You might like to think that if you're reasonable, your child will see the wisdom of your ways. But, most of the time, regardless of what you say, he or she probably will think you're being unfair.

You're going to have countless interactions with your children for many years. Insisting they do things "because I said so" won't carry much weight. Negotiating in a positive, pleasant way makes living together possible.

Negotiating is sometimes mistaken for manipulating. Getting your daughter to do something against her will isn't negotiating. Neither is filibustering. Sometimes children take their parents hostage by engaging them in around-the-clock talks. On the other hand, parents may lecture their 2-year-old for half an hour explaining why climbing on grandma's china closet isn't a good idea.

It's not wrong to persuade your son to your point of view, or for him to convince you he's right. Negotiating is important in family living. Children need to learn this valuable skill and parents continually need to refine it.

Negotiations are good when both yours and your child's needs are met, a so-called win-win situation. Good negotiators don't compete against their opponents. They compete to gain something they believe in.

### Tips on Negotiating

To negotiate effectively, keep in mind the following points:

- Know what you want to accomplish. Think about it in advance. Devise a plan to make it happen. Know what points are not negotiable. Don't be drawn into negotiating something that is a must in your book.
- Take the initiative. Set up a time to talk with your child when you won't be interrupted. Don't hurry the negotiation process.
- Include only the essential players. Don't make it a dinner table discussion with the whole family, if it only involves one child.
- Enlist your spouse's support if two parents are involved. There is strength in numbers. It also signals to your child that a favorite tactic of playing mom against dad won't work this time. If you and your spouse disagree, have the one who feels strongly about the issue do the negotiating. When your child complains to mom that dad just doesn't understand, mom can shrug and say, "You'll have to work that one out with your dad."
- Be courteous. Make it easy for your child to agree with you. Avoid criticism and discussion of past mistakes.
- Listen. Hear your child's needs. Go more than halfway to try to work things out. Revise your plans and strategies according to what you hear.
- Stay with your objectives throughout the discussion. Don't bargain away points that are critical to you. Don't be drawn to other topics.
- Sell your idea continually, pointing out its strengths and advantages. Don't oversell, or you'll lose your credibility.
- Try to remain calm. Be confident you will succeed. Don't lose your temper or try to strong-arm the negotiations.

- Be flexible. Bend on some points that are not critical to you. Some of these may be essential to your child. If you can compromise early in your discussion, you child will feel better about continuing the negotiations.
- Don't rest on past triumphs. Never underestimate the possibility of resistance.
- Keep the negotiations brief. Don't try to outlast your child.
- Use humor to break tension. Avoid embarrassing or ridiculing your child.
- Weigh the pros and cons of your plan with your child. He or she will have a sense that you are truly listening and also see firsthand how thoughtful decisions are made.
- Give yourself time to think things over if you hear something unexpected, or your child proposes an alternative you're not sure of. If your child is resistant to your idea, ask him or her to sleep on it and then talk with you again.
- Make all the agreed upon terms simple and specific. Make sure you both understand them.
- Agree to talk again after the plan is working for a while. If there are slip-ups, don't be too hard on yourself or your child. Look at the problem and again try to find a way to solve it together.
- End on a positive note. Be appreciative of your child's efforts.

Your strategies probably will differ, depending on the age of your child. Here are some developmental factors to consider:

*Preschoolers* are eager to please you. Their wants are impulsive and will probably change within the hour. They are not yet able to reason or think logically. They're often unaware of their own needs and have great difficulty seeing another person's point of view.

For example, your son, who is tired, will never thank you for a nap you want him to take. You may decide that the nap is not negotiable, but that he can choose between going to sleep with his favorite music playing, or listening to the sound of airplanes flying overhead now and then. Short, simple and immediate negotiations work best at this age.

*Elementary school children* want to conform. They seek to imitate adults and want a bigger role in making decisions for themselves. They can follow some of your reasoning but are inconsistent in their own logic. They still have difficulty understanding where you are coming from.

For example, a child may try to insist on designer label clothing. Another child may be tempted by a toy that's widely advertised. Either child might expect you to blow the family budget for the latest trend. You may decide that the amount of money you spend is not negotiable, but that your son can choose to have one designer shirt rather than two that are not. Negotiations that have a concrete plan of action for the child work well with this age.

*Adolescents* have had years of experience in dealing with you. Your teenagers are sure they know where you stand. And it's part of a teen's development to challenge you on virtually everything you hold dear. He or she can probably argue better than an attorney, find loopholes in your position and seem like a very formidable opponent. Your teenager wants to be treated as an adult in one breath and longs to return to the safety of childhood in the next.

For example, your son may think your curfew is too limiting. He says everyone else can come in when they want. You decide that 10 p.m. is reasonable. He explains that doesn't give him enough time after a 7:30 movie to have a soda with his friends and still obey your rule. You compromise on 11 p.m. for most social evenings. He can let you know when there's a special occasion that requires a later curfew. You also agree to reassess the deadline as he shows you he can handle the responsibility. Negotiations with teenagers should provide opportunities for increasing decision making, yet offer the security of parental guidance.

Taking the time to train your children to become good negotiators is time well spent. They will learn to be considerate of others, to work cooperatively, to assume responsibility for their behavior and to get their way more effectively.

## 10 Steps to Get Involved!

*from National PTA's Common Sense*

Children who have strong bonds with their families and school are least at risk of using alcohol and other drugs. Many of the things we can do to strengthen these bonds - such as showing warmth and affection - are based on common sense. You may find these ideas helpful in strengthening existing bonds - and even creating new bonds with your children.

**1. Be a good listener.**
Let your children know they can always come to you with their problems. Show respect for your children's concerns. Establish eye contact with your child when he or she is talking to you. If you are reading or working on an activity, set it aside so your child will have your full attention. Offer encouragement to help your children share ideas and ask questions.

**2. Show a sincere interest in your children's schoolwork and activities.**
Find common interests to talk about relating to school. Ask your children to show you their schoolwork and proudly display their projects. Give them compliments and offer help when it's needed. Remember, your children may not excel in the same subjects you enjoyed in school - allow them to find their own likes and dislikes.

**3. Help your children set realistic goals.**
Children are more likely to succeed when goals are short-term so they don't lose interest. The best goals are easy enough for them to accomplish, yet challenging enough so that they will grow. Praise your children for their efforts and avoid too much pressure. If your son is learning a musical instrument, for example, help him set a goal of practicing every day and comment on the improvement you notice. Don't demand that your children always be the best. Remember, we all have off days.

**4. Set aside time just for your children.**
Plan ahead so you can spend quality time with your children, especially on holidays and special occasions. Try to find opportunities to spend time alone with each child individually. If you're too busy or tired to spend time with your children, explain the reason and arrange another time.

**5. Do things together as a family.**
Look for family activities that don't involve watching television or spending money. There are lots of opportunities - playing a game, reading a book, going for a bike ride, building or baking something. Many cost nothing, but the rewards are great. Keep in mind that regular family meetings are a good idea so you can talk over plans as well as any problems.

**6. Give your child responsibilities around the house.**
Assign each child specific tasks that will help increase his or her sense of responsibility. It might be taking out the garbage, setting the table or walking the dog. Even simple chores help develop a sense of teamwork and feelings of accomplishment.

**7. Show affection often.**
Don't assume your children know they are loved. Remember, a word, a smile or a hug from you can make a big difference. Children are never too old to be told that they are loved.

**8. Develop your children's sense of well being.**
Encourage them to be active, both physically and mentally. This can be as simple as getting them outdoors away from the TV or reading a story together. Nurture your children's interests in new sports, hobbies and activities.

**9. Teach decision-making and problem-solving skills.**
You can help your children learn these skills as they face day-to-day decisions. For example, your child may have a conflict with two activities. Talk about the pros and cons of each choice, then let your child make the decision.

**10. Get to know your children's friends and friends' parents.**
Call and introduce yourself. Stay in touch; share ideas and support. Communicate with other parents to make sure children's activities are always well supervised.

## Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.

Student learning increases when parents are invited into the process by helping at home. Enlisting parents' involvement provides educators and administrators with a valuable support system - creating a team that is working for each child's success.

The vast majority of parents are willing to assist their students in learning, but many times are not sure what assistance is most helpful and appropriate. Helping parents connect to their children's learning enables parents to communicate in powerful ways that they value what their children achieve. Whether it's working together on a computer, displaying student work at home, or responding to a particular class assignment, parents' actions communicate to their children that education is important.

***To evaluate successful programs, ask "How well do we…":***

1. Seek and encourage parental participation in decision-making that affects students.

2. Inform parents of the expectations for students in each subject at each grade level.

3. Provide information regarding how parents can foster learning at home, give appropriate assistance, monitor homework, and give feedback to teachers.

4. Regularly assign interactive homework that will require students to discuss and interact with their parents about what they are learning in class.

5. Sponsor workshops or distribute information to assist parents in understanding how students can improve skills, get help when needed, meet class expectations, and perform well on assessments.

6. Involve parents in setting student goals each year and in planning for post-secondary education and careers. Encourage the development of a personalized education plan for each student, where parents are full partners.

7. Provide opportunities for staff members to learn and share successful approaches to engaging parents in their child's education.

# Tips for Standard III – Student Learning

## How Much Help Is Too Much?

Offer suggestions to parents on how they can help their children learn, including questions to ask and practical ways to practice skills. One English teacher describes how parents can ask questions and make suggestions to help students learn and practice writing skills. Studies have found that writing improves when students seek advice from others and write for an audience. Parents and family members can provide that needed feedback and support.

## Student-Parent Workshops

Provide brief workshops on specific topics of interest to students and parents. Topics might include a series on study skills, new information on a particular curriculum area such as math or science, or college and career planning. When applicable, include hands-on learning activities and detailed information to help both parents and students practice new skills.

## Sample Home-to-School Communication

Design homework assignments to include a parent sign-off. Provide instructions about what to look for in each assignment, and offer a quick check-off response such as:

[ ]My child understands and correctly applies this skill.

[ ]My child needed help on this, but overall seems to understand this lesson.

[ ]My child needs further instruction on this skill/lesson.

Other comments _____

Parent signature _____

## Best Ideas from Teachers

***Including parents in homework.*** As often as possible, I assign homework that parents are directly involved in. An example is when we talk about families and have family words for our spelling words. The homework assignment is to use the spelling words in a five-sentence paragraph about their family. I give them a choice of beginning sentences such as, "My family is the best family in the world" or "My family is a very unusual family". Second graders get a kick out of discussing aunts, uncles, and cousins. And, of course, they need help from parents to spell all these names. *From Judy Moxley, Grade 2, Buffington Elementary School, Canton*

***Sending home a complete reading take-home folder*** that includes: Reading Strategies, Step by Step sheet of what to do for the week, discussion questions, log to record what books have been read and mastered, etc., plus ideas in language arts that parents can effectively use at home for reinforcement. *From Meg Greco, Grade 2, McKendree Elementary School, Lawrenceville*

***To have one or both parents read a novel at the same time that the child is reading the same novel.*** Students select 2 or 3, then narrow it to 1, with help from their parent. After a 3 week reading time, students and parents come to school one morning to have an "Oprah-Style" book discussion with other parents and students. I provide juice, coffee and doughnuts. The students lead the discussion and do a wonderful job. Parents love it and have asked me to repeat the activity! *From Kathy Wentworth, Grade 8, Trickum Middle School, Lilburn*

***Traveling Books.*** I used this idea in my Pre-K classroom, but it can be adapted for grades K-2. My idea involves traveling books. We made classroom books, with each child contributing a page of his/her original work. These pages were then bound together and sent home with a different child each day. At the back of the book was a note explaining that the book was made by each individual child and it encouraged the parent to read the book with his or her child. It also explained the importance of the children seeing themselves as authors and it suggested that they return the book tomorrow so another child could benefit from it. Behind this page was a page entitled "Parents' Comments" where parents were free to record any compliments, questions or comments they may have had about the book. We made several books throughout the year. At the beginning of the year, we made a "Meet the Class" book. I took photographs of each child and glued the picture along side an information page where the child had recorded their name, favorite color, and age. This could be expanded to include hobbies, addresses, favorite books and so on for the older grades. My parents loved getting to put a face with the new friends that were mentioned at the start of school. We also used these to complete a theme that we had been studying. After reading and discussing *There's a Monster in My Attic*, my students completed a drawing of what was in their attics (real or imaginary) and we completed the sentence, "There is a _____in my attic." My parents loved seeing the creativity in each child and they looked forward to reading these special books with their child at home. *From Rebecca Spears, Former Teacher, Mountain Road Elementary School, Woodstock*

At the beginning of the year, I do a great activity. Each child takes home a ***"Home Bag"*** which includes a different parent/child activity that is due back on Friday. Usually in the home bags are games or a small fun activity to bridge the gap between home and school. This is done with the parent and child. The activity always deals with a concept we are doing in class. Also, at the beginning of the school year, I have a disposable camera in a bag with directions. The concept is to take a picture of a special place in the student's home where they like to read. Each child has a turn to take the bag with camera home and take a picture in their, what we call, ***"Book Nook".*** After every child has taken the camera home, I develop the pictures and display them between school and home. When I tell the parents the student needs to be reading at home in their book nooks for at least 20 minutes a night, it has more importance. *From Laura Fedorchuk, Grade 3, Carmel Elementary, Acworth*

***Vocabulary- Word-A-Day Project.*** Students are given a list of vocabulary words and their definitions. They are also given a calendar numbered from 1 to 60. They are to write one word each day from their list in the calendar spaces. They are to share that word with their family. Parents are to sign the calendars on a regular basis. Students bring the calendars into class periodically for checking. This has been very successful with my students and the parents have been very cooperative. Many have told me they as well as their children are learning new words. *From Betty Sue Campbell, Grade 6, Paul D. West Middle School, East Point*

***Parent as a Partner Day***. A parent acts as the lab partner with their student. I teach Chemistry, so I would have several labs organized in which the parent came in for that period and conducted the lab as a partner. Several labs were used so that we would not be overcrowded. The parent and the student were both responsible for a complete write-up with conclusion. (The write-up analyzes the data and is done as a homework assignment). I have done this in Physic labs as well. This idea can be expanded to other subjects: English - a parent and student combined book report where both present the report orally to the class. Social Studies – a parent/student open discussion on current event as related to past events. ***Change Day.*** This is an old idea but it is pretty good for building community relations. The concept is that the student goes to work at the parent's employment and the parent takes the student's schedule for a day. *From Tom Beatty, Science Department, Woodstock High School, Woodstock*

## What Difference Does Parental Support Make in a Child's Education?

Parents and the environment they create at home are crucial factors in determining a child's overall educational achievement. If you have ever wondered what impact your involvement and interest in your child's educational process has, consider the following:

- Your attitude about education will dictate how your child will approach learning. A parent who participates in their child's educational process communicates a message to their child that education is important. A child who receives such a message has motivation to succeed.
- Parental involvement is a must if the maximum benefits of educational experiences are to be realized. Teachers cannot do the job themselves. The demands of a classroom of students prevents a teacher from providing the kind of individual attention needed to stimulate each child to their fullest.
- Differences in academic achievement and cognitive development can be traced to the parents' reinforcement of school activities at home. Children who receive help at home achieve higher standards than those that do not, despite the ability of the parent. Not even additional help from the classroom teacher is nearly as helpful as assistance from parents.
- Praise and encouragement are recognized by educators as one of the most effective tools of teaching. The child whose parents are involved in the educational process receives the benefits of reinforcement from the single most important source in his/her life, his/her parents.
- No one knows your child like you do. You know what motivates your child, his/her interests, strengths, desires, and history. This is a wealth of information that is useful to the classroom teacher.
- Every parent is involved in the education of their child on a daily basis. A child's education does not begin and end at school. Every experience for a child is a learning experience.

As a parent you play a vital role in planning and establishing the kinds of activities in your home that will stimulate and increase the intellectual skills of your child. The rewards of your interests and involvement make a significant difference in whether your child will succeed in the educational process. Research indicates that intelligence, behavior, and ability to learn is greatly influenced by the kinds of situations and experiences the child is exposed to during the first years of life. Listed below are some ideas for awakening your pre-school child's senses and intellectual skills in order to provide a strong foundation for future learning.

### Ways to Stimulate Your Child to Learn Beginning at Birth:

- Place bright shapes, colorful mobiles, and interesting pictures in your child's room.
- Talk to your child often, varying your expression and tone of voice. Encourage your child to speak by surrounding him/her with talk, praising attempts to talk, and giving positive feedback.
- Listen intently to your child, and look at him/her when they are trying to communicate with you. Babbling is an early attempt at communication and should not be ignored.
- Sing to your child, and play nursery rhyme games with him/her.
- Take your child on short trips where they are exposed to different environments, such as zoos, museums, and recreation parks.
- Read to your child everyday.
- Give your child simple tasks to complete. This helps develop a sense of responsibility.
- Buy educational toys, games, and other manipulatives for your child to play with.
- Praise and encourage your child.
- Pursue a variety of interests and activities as a family. This models an enthusiasm for learning, doing, and the continual attainment of knowledge.

A child learns and develops most rapidly as an infant and toddler. Therefore, parental involvement is critical during this period. Parents are the first and most important teachers a child has. Unless a child

receives adequate mental stimulation during infancy and the toddler years, the chance for success in school may be significantly reduced

A child does better in school when he/she has parents that are involved in his/her education. In addition, parental involvement in the school can also give parents an opportunity to gain information and insights into their child's education.

### Ways to Become Involved in Your Child's Education:

- Develop a relationship with your child's teacher and principal.
- Attend school functions, such as open house, PTA meetings, parent/teacher conferences, and special activities.
- Volunteer as a classroom aide.
- Join parent committees and parent groups. Attend PTA meetings.
- Ask your child about school on a daily basis.
- Attend school board or local school council meetings.
- Create a study-friendly space at home for your child.
- Let your child know that you think their education is important.
- Read and respond to all communication sent home from school.
- Become familiar with the curriculum and what your child is learning at school.
- Talk about what your children are learning at school while at the table eating supper or driving to soccer practice.
- When tests and reports come home, change the focus from "whatdja get?" to "whatdja learn?"
- Ask your kids to read their textbooks to you while you sort laundry, drive the car, or fix dinner.
- Play the "Family Merry-Go-Round". Start a sentence that each person in the family must complete in turn. "The most surprising thing I learned today was…" "One of the things I did well today was…"
- Don't stow it – Show it. Display your child's schoolwork on the refrigerator or bulletin board.
- Ask teachers for advice about homework and how to reinforce learning at home.

## Ten Ways for Parents to Help Teachers

*by Mimi Doe, author of "Busy but Balanced"*

Many teachers have written to me over the years, frustrated with how unprepared their students are and they don't mean academically. Chris, a kindergarten teacher, wrote what many teachers have expressed, "I would love it if you could write a 10 tips for parents to help us teachers do our increasingly demanding job. Many parents of children I teach have left the job of spiritual, character, and social/emotional education to me. I can't do it all in addition to teaching academic skills. I'm getting burned out and pretty soon won't have the energy left to nourish one child let alone 25."

### So here goes – my 10 tips:

1. Create a smooth takeoff each day. Give your child a hug before she ventures out the door and you head to work. Look her in the eye, and tell her how proud you are of her. Your child's self-confidence and security will help her do well both in school and in life.
2. Prepare for a happy landing at the end of the day when you reconvene. Create a predictable ritual such as 10-20 minutes listening to your child talk about his day – before you check phone messages, read the mail, or begin dinner. That way you are fully present to listen, and your child has a touchstone he can count on between school and home.
3. Fill your child's lunchbox with healthy snacks and lunches. Have dinner at a reasonable hour and a healthy breakfast. A well-balanced diet maximizes your child's learning potential.
4. Include calm, peaceful times in your children's afternoons and evenings. Maintain a schedule that allows them to go to school rested, and if they are sick, have a system in place so they are able to stay home.
5. Remember it's your children's homework, not yours. Create a specific homework space that's clutter-free and quiet. Encourage editing and double-checking work, but allow your kids to make mistakes, as it's the only way teachers can gauge if they understand the material. It's also how children learn responsibility for the quality of their work.
6. Fill your child's life with a love for learning by showing him your own curiosity, respecting his questions, and encouraging his efforts.
7. Fill your home with books to read, books simply to look at, and books that provide answers to life's many questions. The public or school library is an excellent resource.
8. Be a partner with your child's teacher. When you need to speak to him or her in reference to a specific issue with your child, do it privately, not in front of your child. Make a point never to criticize your child's teacher in front of your child.
9. Set up a system where routine items are easily located – such as backpacks, shoes, signed notices. Create a central calendar for upcoming events to avoid the unexpected.
10. Tuck a "love note" in your child's lunch bag to let her know how special she is. Knowing they are loved makes it easier for children to be kind to others.

## Help Your Child Learn to Write Well

Excellent writing skills increase language ability, organizational skills, and makes one a more effective communicator. Writing is best learned through practice and patience. The more a child writes, the better writer he/she will become. There are many activities that can be done at home to reinforce writing skills. Below are a few ideas to get parents started!

- Give your child a diary, and encourage him/her to write in it everyday.
- Encourage your child to write stories about special events and/or family experiences.
- Encourage your child to write letters to family members and friends.
- Give your child a scrapbook, and encourage him/her to fill it and write his/her own captions for pictures.
- Sign your child up for a pen pal.
- Have your child write directions for preparing his/her favorite snack, and then follow the directions he/she wrote exactly.
- Read the beginning of a story to your child, and then ask your child to write an ending to the story.
- Praise your child's written work.
- Give your child plenty of time to complete a written task. Provide the materials for your child to use when writing.

## Tips for Raising Readers

The amount of time parents spend reading to their child is the single most important factor influencing their child's literacy. Parents lay the foundation for a lifetime of reading. If they know how to create an environment that makes learning fun, the foundation will be positive and encourage reading. Listed below are important tips for parents on how to create a positive reading environment based on *Raising Readers: Helping Your Child to Literacy*, a book by reading specialist Steven Bialostok.

- Encourage your child to guess what words could mean rather than asking them to sound the words out.
- Do not drill words on flashcards. Instead, find opportunities to reread familiar books so children can learn words within a meaningful context.
- Feel excited if your child has memorized a book and will not let you skip a page. Memorizing a book is one of the first steps to beginning to read.
- Allow finger pointing to follow along with the text.
- Do not force your child to read or listen to you read if he/she does not want to. Children learn best when they have the power to do so themselves.
- Have your child sit close to you when you read to them. Watching Mom or Dad read aloud provides many opportunities to see and learn about print.
- Do not worry about the number of times you read the same book. Children love hearing books read again and again. They will also read those books on their own just as often.
- Help your child discover print in many contexts, such as on cereal boxes, street signs, favorite stores, and restaurants.
- Do not expect your child to actively engage in reading if they never see you read.
- Make books accessible to your child at all times. Keep books on shelves he/she can reach, in the car for long drives, and in travel bags and purses for quick access away from home.

Your child, like most children, will learn how to read. Whether the child will read and read fluently depends partly on you. Children who read well come from homes which have plenty of books, magazines, and newspapers, and all the family members read. Their parents encourage reading and make time for it.

## Help Your Young Child Learn Math

There are three elements that are essential for a child to learn math. The three elements a child must have to learn math are understanding, practice, and being able to see patterns. If a child has a basic understanding of the steps involved in solving a math problem, he/she will be able to apply his/her knowledge to every following problem and build upon their knowledge to solve harder problems. Practice reinforces basic skills, such as adding, subtraction, multiplication, and division, and helps a child remember how to use the skills correctly. Being able to see patterns is important because math is filled with patterns and regularity. However, there are several ways for a parent to reinforce and encourage all three elements. A few are listed below.

- Encourage counting. Concrete objects and examples help facilitate counting.
- Use money. Help your child count the correct change to give a cashier, and let the child pay for the item. If your child receives change back from the cashier, encourage him/her to count it and make sure it is correct.
- Compare the costs of several items in a store.
- Play number games.
- Divide food into different parts. Let the child decide if each part is equal and how many parts are present.
- Let your child help you sort clothes by color and size.
- Identify numbers whenever you see them, such as in the grocery store, on a calendar, or on a road sign.
- Encourage your child to estimate quantities and then count to see if he/she estimated correctly.
- Discuss increments of time with your child.
- Insist that your child study and complete his/her math homework. Be available to answer any questions your child may have.
- Discuss shapes, and try to find different shapes within your home.
- Let your child help you measure quantities when cooking.

## Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought.

When parents volunteer, both families and schools reap benefits that come in few other ways. Literally millions of dollars of volunteer services are performed by parents and family members each year in the public schools. Studies have concluded that volunteers express greater confidence in the schools where they have opportunities to participate regularly. In addition, assisting in school or program events/activities communicates to a child, "I care about what you do here."

In order for parents to feel appreciated and welcome, volunteer work must be meaningful and valuable to them. Capitalizing on the expertise and skills of parents and family members provides much needed support to educators and administrators already taxed in their attempts to meet academic goals and student needs. Although there are many parents for whom volunteering during school hours is not possible, creative solutions like before- or after-school "drop-in" programs or "at home" support activities provide opportunities for parents to offer their assistance as well.

***To evaluate successful programs, ask "How well do we…":***

1. Ensure that office staff greetings, signage near the entrances, and any other interaction with parents create a climate in which parents feel valued and welcome.

2. Survey parents regarding their interests, talents, and availability, then coordinate the parent resources with those that exist within the school and among the faculty.

3. Ensure that parents who are unable to volunteer in the school building are given the options for helping in other ways, at home or place of employment.

4. Organize an easy, accessible program for utilizing parent volunteers, providing ample training on volunteer procedures and school protocol.

5. Develop a system for contacting all parents to assist as the year progresses.

6. Design opportunities for those with limited time and resources to participate by addressing child care, transportation, work schedule needs, and so forth.

7. Show appreciation for parents' participation, and value their diverse contributions.

8. Educate and assist staff members in creating an inviting climate and effectively utilizing volunteer resources.

9. Ensure that volunteer activities are meaningful and built on volunteer interests and abilities.

# Tips for Standard IV - Volunteering

## Volunteer Orientation

- Take time to train volunteers regarding school or program protocols, routines and procedures, volunteer expectations, and equipment usage. In addition, provide a central location for volunteers to work with secure places for personal belongings.
- Give clear instructions for completing volunteer tasks as well as the appropriate staff or teacher contact name if more information is needed. Look for creative ways to show appreciation for volunteer support on an ongoing basis.

## Volunteer Information Packet

As part of the volunteer orientation, provide a packet containing the following important information:

- Volunteer welcome letter and list of benefits
- Volunteer work locations
- Where to go for help and supplies
- List of "Volunteer Do's & Don'ts"
- Sign-in/out policies
- Suggestion forms
- Building map
- Parking information
- Equipment operating instructions
- School or program handbook
- Accident procedures
- Emergency exit plans

## Best Ideas

Accommodate both working and stay-at-home parents. Survey parents early in the school year to learn where their interests and skills lie. Provide opportunities for volunteering during the school day, in the evenings, and on weekends.

Conduct a school-climate survey. In cooperation with the school administration, determine whether your school is parent-friendly. Use the information to make the climate more inviting for parent volunteers.

Host a "how you can make a difference" orientation meeting each year for parents and volunteers. Invite school staff to address relevant topics, and provide parents and other volunteers with timely information.

Create a volunteer center in the school. Be creative – almost any facility can accommodate some sort of welcoming area for volunteers, from a corner of the media center to an area of the hallway with a couple of lockers for personal belongings. Put up a bulletin board for announcements and be sure to provide a place to sign in and record volunteer hours.

Show your gratitude! Create a wall of fame to highlight volunteers who've gone above and beyond the call of duty. Host volunteer appreciation events, highlight volunteers in the school or PTA newsletter, and be sure to send thank you notes.

Announce volunteer opportunities in the school or PTA newsletter. Start a Fathers' Club to create a wider pool of volunteers for activities.

Hold a PTA Expo at the beginning of the year to explain what PTA does and how parents and other volunteers can help.

Distribute a directory of volunteers to PTA committee chairs, room parents, and teachers.

## Ways for Parents to Volunteer

- Volunteer as a classroom aide. Teachers often seek parents to tutor in the classroom, listen to students read, develop materials, or help in health screening.
- Volunteer to be a chaperone on class field trips.
- Volunteer to help in the media center.
- Share the talents and skills from your personal/professional experience with the teacher and students.
- Volunteer to help with school functions, such as field day or open house.
- Join parent committees and parenting groups, such as PTA or the Booster Clubs.
- Volunteer to help in the front office, guidance office or attendance office.
- Volunteer to help make costumes for a school play.
- Volunteer to work at the concession stand or collect money at athletic events.
- Volunteer to help students build or paint the set for a school drama production.
- Run for a school board or local school council position.
- Campaign among other parents to change a school policy that you feel is not beneficial to students.
- Volunteer to help decorate for a graduation ceremony.
- Volunteer to participate in a holiday assembly.
- Volunteer to help sponsor a talent show.
- Volunteer to provide refreshments during a game for a sports team.
- Volunteer to let a school club hold a meeting at your house.
- Volunteer to be a team parent for an athletic team.
- Volunteer to help with a student government, football, or band camp during the summer.
- Volunteer to transport equipment during competitions, such as baseball equipment or band instruments.
- Volunteer to transport students during a competition, such as a cheerleading competition.
- Volunteer to help decorate for a school event, such as Prom or Homecoming.
- Volunteer to chaperone a school dance.
- Volunteer to call and update all school alumni.
- Volunteer to sponsor a party for a club or athletic team.
- Volunteer to clean up the school bus after a field trip or competition.
- Make baked goods, and give them to students before a competition to encourage them.
- Volunteer to clean up the stadium after a sporting event.
- Volunteer to be responsible for the First Aid kit during school events for a sports team, cheerleading squad, or the band.
- Volunteer to wash or mend school uniforms.
- Volunteer to house an exchange student.
- Volunteer to design fliers or publish a school or PTA newsletter.
- Offer to find other volunteers from your office to share their time or talents at school.
- Offer to help with a school or PTA web site.
- Volunteer to share your talents with students in an after school program.
- Make arrangements for students to visit your place of work.
- Call a legislator or school board member to talk about the needs of students and schools in your community.
- Offer to translate materials into another language.

## How to Set Up a Parent/Family Involvement Program

There is no one proven step-by-step method to strengthen parental involvement. Each community is different. Before starting a parent involvement program, check to see if the district has a parental involvement policy. If so, it needs to be followed. However, the following model can be adapted to fit each individual community's needs.

**Step One: Make A Commitment.** Encourage your parent group to adopt a broad commitment to parent involvement. Then, begin recruiting other people that need to be involved. First, recruit the principal, and then recruit the parents, teachers, and school staff, superintendent, and district as a whole. Ask them to support the concept that parental involvement is essential for all children.

**Step Two: Identify Leaders.** Choose a parent involvement coordinator. This key person should be willing to serve for at least two years to give your program continuity. Set up a parent involvement steering committee. Include parents, principal, teachers, support staff, PTA members, community members, and students. The committee's purpose is to develop and run your school's parent involvement program.

**Step Three: Collect Information.** Collect information from other schools and PTAs with successful parent involvement programs. Contact the National PTA or the Georgia PTA for additional information on model programs for parental involvement.

**Step Four: Improve Communication.** Take a look at how school-home communication works at your school. Does your school welcome all parents?

**Step Five: Gather Input.** Survey parents about their needs and their views on parental participation, and survey teachers about their views on parental participation in the classroom and at home.

**Step Six: Share Ideas.** Ask leaders from your PTA to appear at faculty meetings and in-service training sessions to share effective ways schools can communicate with parents and the benefits of parental involvement for teachers, children, parents, and the community.

**Step Seven: Be Inclusive.** Think about who you may have left out. Are you calling on the same people once again, or are you reaching out to new faces in new groups?

**Step Eight: Set Goals.** Based on surveys and your review of home-school communication, choose three to five parental involvement goals for your school. Two or three should be realistic short-term goals that can be accomplished in six to nine months. The last goals should be long-term goals that can be accomplished over a period of two to five years. Put your plans in writing, including listing your goals, step-by-step plans, timelines, and budget.

**Step Nine: Publicize Your Plan.** Present your parental involvement plan to parents and school staff for their information and support.

**Step Ten: Get Started.** Implement your program.

**Step Eleven: Evaluate Your Program.** Keep notes on successes, problems, and ideas for improvement. Document and publicize results. For example, document and publicize improvement in targeted areas, such as school attendance or homework completion. Look for success stories to show that your parental involvement program made a difference. Plan for next year based upon this year's evaluation.

**Step Twelve: Network. Spread The Word.** Gather resources and network. You do not have to do this alone. Call your PTA council, district or Georgia PTA office, local community center, and/or the library. Describe your goals. Ask for help, cooperation, and resources.

## Seven Steps to a Successful Volunteer Program

*from National PTA's Building Successful Partnerships*

### 1. Assessing Volunteer Needs at School

Volunteer coordinators or teams need to meet regularly and work with the teachers and staff members who will work closest with the volunteers. Teacher and staff involvement and commitment is crucial to the inception and long-term success of any volunteer program.

Once school staff and teachers have been surveyed to find out what they need, parents should also be surveyed to learn about their talents, interests, and skills. This dual method provides the most accurate way for developing relevant and meaningful opportunities for parents to volunteer.

### 2. Working with and Training Principals, Teachers, and School Staff on Effectively Using and Supervising Volunteers

Principals can serve as the overall supervisor of a school's volunteer program. PTAs then can work with principals and encourage them to:

- Inform staff and teachers about the mission of the program.
- Make space available to volunteers.
- Hold meetings with volunteers and staff.
- Assist in providing training to teacher and staff.
- Although many teachers feel overworked, they still may feel reluctant to take on volunteers if they perceive them as an extra burden rather than help. Teachers also may feel that their competency or capacity to maintain control over their classroom may be challenged by a volunteer's presence.
- Providing adequate training to principals and working with teachers to inform them of the appropriate roles, uses, and supervision of volunteers is essential for a successful volunteer program.

### 3. Setting Goals and Objectives for Volunteer Assignments

To ensure a successful volunteer program and long-term involvement on the volunteers' part, it is important that assignments are carefully selected and are productive, meaningful, and closely matched to volunteers' interests, skills, and motivation for volunteering. Volunteers want to feel they are needed, and that their jobs are valued and important. PTA volunteer coordinators, teachers, and school staff must work with each other to develop creative and specific job descriptions for volunteers.

A job description not only gives a volunteer a clear idea of what is expected, but it also clearly defines and clarifies the fob for the faculty and staff who will train, work with, and supervise the volunteer.

### 4. Recruiting Volunteers

Recruitment is one of the most challenging steps in the process. Techniques for involving people in volunteer work should be creative and far-reaching. Recruitment should take place throughout the year to replace volunteers as well as to enlist additional assistance for new programs.

Two recruiting issues need to be addressed: who can be a volunteer and how to reach out and find volunteers.

***Who:***

- Schools and PTAs have depended too long on stay-at-home parents as their primary source for volunteers. Although many parents now work full time, there are still vast reservoirs of talent and potential that often remain untapped because schools do not approach this perceived barrier in creative ways.
- Working 9-to-5 is not the norm for many people. Schools often overlook the large population of adults who work second and third shifts (which are predominantly evening hours), weekends, or flexible schedules as potential daytime volunteers. Parents who do work a traditional 9-to-5 schedule can volunteer their time in the evenings, on weekends, or at home.

***How:***

- It is important to arrange meetings at local work sites, senior centers, or retirement communities. At these meetings, volunteer coordinators or teams can talk with prospective candidates about the importance of, as well as the need for, their involvement with the school.

### 5. Training and Orienting Volunteers

Once you have new volunteers, training and orientation are crucial. They can ease anxiety and confusion, alleviate fears, and increase the chances that volunteers will have a long-term relationship with the school. Orientation and training sessions set a welcoming tone and create support for volunteers. Orientation sessions should familiarize volunteers with the following:

- School facilities
- School staff and teachers
- Philosophy and mission of the school and the volunteer program
- Operating policies and procedures of the school
- Security

### 6. Retaining and Recognizing Volunteers

While volunteers may choose to become involved for many reasons, their continued commitment and motivation does not come from a paycheck, but rather from a deeper kind of gratification. To develop and sustain a feeling of belonging and satisfaction among volunteers, it is important to do the following:

- Provide ongoing training for volunteers
- Train continually and monitor teachers and staff in their work with volunteers
- Treat volunteers as colleagues
- Provide regular activities that show appreciation of volunteer efforts

### 7. Evaluating Volunteer Performance and Program Success

As with any successful program, there needs to be continued evaluation that results in improvements. Through surveys, questionnaires, observations, and personal interviews, the program's general success at meeting the needs of children, teachers, staff, and volunteers can be assessed. These methods also can be used to assess the individual performance of each volunteer, the effectiveness of orientation and training sessions, and the volunteer program's procedures and recruitment strategies.

## Parents Are a School's Best Friend

*by June Cavarretta, a parent volunteer in the Community Unit School District 300 in Illinois*

***How do concerned parents move beyond bake sales and bulletin boards? In an Illinois school district, a shared decision-making process empowers families to participate fully in major school decisions.***

When my first child entered school, I became a parent volunteer. I baked treats, cut out bulletin boards, made photocopies for the teachers, served as an officer in the parent-teacher council, and chaperoned field trips. All very traditional parent volunteer roles. Thirteen years and two more children later, I'm still an active parent volunteer. But my work has changed dramatically.

I've surveyed, collated, and evaluated data on programs. I've facilitated a team of parents and teachers who restructured virtually every aspect of the school program, moving from a high school model with an emphasis on coursework to a middle school model that focuses on students. I've learned about team building, team learning, consensus, best practices, and the importance of vision. More recently, I've learned about dialogue, the Malcolm Baldridge model, and chaos theory as it applies to leadership and organizations. I've attended education conferences with my children's teachers and been part of several district teams that have shared our story at conferences in other states.

And while I've been busy with those tasks, other parent volunteers have participated on teams that have selected textbooks, created new courses and report cards, investigated dress codes, developed new formats for parent-teacher conferences, reinvented student orientation processes, and developed technology plans involving hundreds of thousands of dollars.

That may sound like work best left to professionals -- the curriculum directors, teachers, principals, and various specialists charged with educating children. But in Community Unit School District 300 in Carpentersville, Illinois, it's how we do business.

### Shared Vision, Shared Decisions

More than 400 parent volunteers in my district have been trained to participate in our children's education through shared decision making. Working in planning teams of parents, teachers, students, administrators, and community members, each school district in District 300 practices a governance model that focuses on trust building, collaboration, shared vision, and continuous improvement to effect true academic reform. We call it, quite simply, "school improvement."

District 300 is a large district 35 miles northwest of Chicago that educates about 15,200 students in eight communities, including rural, suburban, and urban settings. We are not a wealthy district: At $4,875, our cost-per-pupil expenditure is well below the state average of $6,158 and is one of the lowest in the Chicago area. Additionally, we are growing at a rate of one school a year. We're struggling to provide adequate classroom space and meet the challenges of increasing cultural diversity.

Given the district's limited financial resources and growing diversity, schools need to control their own resources based on their students' needs. Our governance model of shared decision making gives schools the freedom to do just that. It's a district move away from the traditional school district organization in which administrators make all hiring and curriculum decisions, and parent participation is limited to fund-raising, "teacher helper" roles, and parent-teacher organizations that lack the power to make meaningful decisions.

## A Vehicle for Reform

Teams of mixed-role stakeholders at each site learn a collaborative process that focuses on creating a shared vision and continuous improvement. This school improvement model has become the vehicle for volunteerism and reform. Teams create a mission based on student needs and set goals to achieve that mission.

Our district's decision to forge authentic family partnerships between home and school reflects the nationwide trend to grant parents and community members the power to directly influence the educational process. Under this model, our schools have accomplished major academic reforms, including the adoption of high school block scheduling, a true middle school philosophy, and multi-age classrooms and looping (teachers' having classes of the same children for several years) at some elementary sites. One of the middle schools has adopted a dress code, and high schools differ in their graduation requirements.

So committed is the district administration to empowering parents to be direct participants that when voters approved a tax increase to build a new K-8 school, a planning team of parents and community members was in place long before the principal was selected or a single brick laid. That planning team not only worked with the architects, but also developed the school's curriculum, created a long-term technology plan, chose textbooks, planned the media center, and assisted in the principal-selection process.

## Challenging Tradition

Turning the district's vision of shared decision making into reality has not been easy. It can be a hard sell to tradition-bound staff used to making decisions on their own. Shared decision making has meant jarring people out of their comfort zones: principals who have called the shots for years; teachers and curriculum specialists who consider themselves the experts; and parents whose attitudes towards schools range from complacency to combativeness. Equally challenging is bringing students into a collaborative process that may ultimately change how they experience school. They can be the most resistant of all.

Our process for shared decision-making strives to value all perspectives. For instance, I recall an early planning team meeting where an activity called for sharing our school's successes. Teachers enthusiastically participated, while most parents sat in silence. Many of us were new to the school and didn't know much about it. Others were inhibited at sharing in a group that included their child's teachers.

Finally, in the midst of all the praise, one brave parent said, "My child comes home from school and cries." For a moment, there was silence. Similar accounts followed. I now see that as a breakthrough moment when highly disparate individuals moved an inch toward truly listening to one another. It initiated a much-needed review of how elementary schoolchildren make the transition into middle school. Ultimately, it became a key element in defining the school's goals.

## The Power of Relationships

Could data such as "need to improve transition process" and "my child cries about school" be gathered from a parent survey? Probably, and our school improvement teams do use surveys to obtain needed input. But the power of gathering people to build relationships cannot be understated. Relationships bolster our school improvement process and represent one of our district's core values.

Spending time building trust among stakeholders carries teams through the rocky patches of school reform. Our process is not easy, nor is it tidy. It requires consensus, not votes, and works hard to build bridges and dismantle walls. Everyone must be heard, and everyone must learn together. It is on this foundation that schools work to build partnership and trust rather than delegation and suspicion.

How does that happen? District 300 supports the school improvement process with continuous training efforts. Twice a year, mixed-role stakeholders from the sites attend two week-long workshops and learn about trust, collaboration, and shared vision. This training, and other professional development opportunities our district offers all stakeholders, are the backbone of our school improvement process. We do have rules that govern the process, although they're different from the rules most other districts follow. Ultimately the school board accepts or rejects each site's school improvement plan. I can't imagine how a district could successfully implement a model of shared decision making without committing substantive training efforts to support it.

Further, regular training ensures that stakeholders can learn when they're ready. At any given site, you'll find those visionary thinkers who have embraced shared decision making and leap into uncharted territory without hesitation. Many more are willing to follow in their footsteps, while others hesitate and adopt a wait-and-see attitude. And yes, others vehemently oppose site-based decision making, silently or loudly. Continuous training and adherence to the process means that the door doesn't have to close on anyone.

## Building Trust

School improvement teams are not always composed of positive people who support academic reform. My experiences in reform initiatives have shown just the opposite. Sometimes stakeholders join teams with the specific agenda of halting initiatives.

That certainly happened at my daughter's high school when the planning team undertook a study of block scheduling. A parent who joined the team with the loudly proclaimed mission of preventing such a travesty eventually became one of the biggest supporters of the reform. The process gave voice to his opposition and fears; learning about alternate schedules empowered him to directly influence the educational process at his children's school. Everybody won. A process built on trust and consensus rather than suspicion and majority vote helps make that a reality for all our decisions.

In such a large, diverse district, it would be easy to lose sight of what everyone is doing. But our central administration has shifted to a service-oriented role that supports each site's school improvement efforts. Its newest initiative, Partnership for Accountability, is developing a quality review process for each site to assess its improvement efforts.

A district-wide communication council supports schools by encouraging the flow of information among sites. The council, which meets monthly, is evenly composed of community members and staff. Council members learn team-building and problem-solving strategies while monitoring district issues and national education trends and research.

School board policy and contract language further support the school improvement process. In fact, all seven members of the school board have been trained in the process, and many began their involvement in the district as members of local school improvement teams.

## Breaking the Mold

I cannot think of another volunteer experience I've had that has been as meaningful as my participation in school improvement. My work counts. My voice is heard. I've made a difference for my children. Hundreds of other parent volunteers in my district have broken the mold of traditional parent volunteers and have helped shape the educational landscape of their schools. These efforts have not gone unrecognized. District 300 has earned several prestigious awards.

Although such recognition is a tremendous honor for the district, another measure of success is much more important to me. Several years ago, a divisive school board cast long shadows over our district. Board members spent more time arguing over roof repairs than taking substantive interest in educa-

tion. An impending deficit, a pressing need for more classrooms, and a vocal conservative opposition to public education compounded the problem.

In efforts to reclaim the school district for the children, a grassroots citizens' group formed and successfully slated four school board candidates in a field of 17 challengers. That was in 1993. Since then, the group has successfully seated all 15 school board seats up for reelection. In 1994, Citizens Organized for Responsible Education (CORE) turned a 2-1 referendum defeat into a 2-1 victory. In November 1997, another school construction referendum attempt suffered a 2-1 defeat. CORE again went to work on a second campaign. Although the group turned 3,000 opponents into supporters, the measure still fell short by 1,300 votes. The recent defeat demonstrates that our political advocacy efforts must focus on maintaining a viable public education system. These political realities also underscore the need for schools to involve parents and community members in substantive ways.

Many of our people originally involved in organizing CORE, including myself, had participated on school improvement teams and had been trained in collaboration. Our training enabled us to bring together diverse people from across the district, which is 118 square miles, to work for the good of our district, regardless of local site issues.

For some participants, political advocacy led to joining school improvement teams. For others, involvement on school improvement teams precipitated political advocacy. That CORE even exists is a powerful testament to the commitment stakeholders make to protect our model of shared decision making, for winning elections and referendums represent difficult and complex work.

## Slow Change and Parental Urgency

My one regret about our school improvement process is that considerable time can elapse before meaningful change occurs. I joined my first school improvement team when my oldest daughter entered 6th grade. She was a high school freshman when we implemented the middle school philosophy. She missed it, but my second daughter and greatly benefited from the changes.

Similarly, it took almost three years to study, develop, and implement block scheduling at her high school, which began this year. My oldest daughter is now a college freshman, so she missed out again. But my sophomore reaps its benefits. My third daughter is a 4th grader. I'm confident that the academic reforms so many teams worked so hard to realize will continue to flourish for her.

My experience seeing my children move through the school system underscores a critical factor in school improvement efforts, that of parental urgency. Children slip through schools quickly. Parents don't have a lot of time to wait for schools to get it right. We want it right for our kids, and we want it that way now.

Balancing that sense of urgency with the professional concerns of the staff, which sometimes involve job issues rather than what's best for the children, can be tricky. A 7th grade math teacher, for instance, wants another year to prepare for team teaching. The parent of a 7th grader, however, once convinced of its merits, wants the team teaching to start now so her child can reap its benefits. Both have legitimate concerns. Such scenarios underscore the need for consistent training, for building relationships, and for listening to the concerns of all stakeholders while working toward consensus.

Easy? Hardly. Worth the time it takes? Definitely. In fact, I've staked my children's education on it.

## Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families.

Studies have shown that schools where parents are involved in decision-making and advocacy have higher levels of student achievement and greater public support.

Effective partnerships develop when each partner is respected and empowered to fully participate in the decision-making process. Schools and programs that actively enlist parent participation and input communicate that parents are valued as full partners in the educating of their children.

Parents and educators depend on shared authority in decision-making systems to foster parental trust, public confidence, and mutual support of each other's efforts in helping students succeed. The involvement of parents, as individuals or as representative of others, is crucial in collaborative decision making processes on issues from curriculum and course selection, to discipline policies and overall school reform measures.

***To evaluate successful programs, ask "How well do we…":***

1. Provide understandable, accessible, and well-publicized processes for influencing decisions, raising issues or concerns, appealing decisions, and resolving problems.

2. Encourage the formation of PTAs or other parent groups to identify and respond to issues of interest to parents.

3. Include parents on all decision-making and advisory committees, and ensure adequate training for such areas as policy, curriculum, budget, school reform initiatives, safety, and personnel. Where site governance bodies exist, give equal representation to parents.

4. Provide parents with current information regarding school policies, practices, and both student and school performance data.

5. Enable parents to participate as partners when setting school goals, developing or evaluating programs and policies, or responding to performance data.

6. Encourage and facilitate active parent participation in the decisions that affect students, such as student placement, course selection, and individual personalized education plans.

7. Treat parental concerns with respect and demonstrate genuine interest in developing solutions.

8. Promote parent participation on school district, state, and national committees and issues.

9. Provide training for staff and parents on collaborative partnering and shared decision making.

# Tips for Standard V – School Decision Making & Advocacy

## Parent Involvement in Making Program Decisions

By recruiting parent representatives to serve on committees dealing with policies and program decisions, administrators acknowledge the importance of parents' knowledge of and experience with children.

To ensure ongoing effective parent participation in the decision-making process, policy makers can work to create an environment where parents can:

- Attend open meetings on school/program issues
- Receive clear program goals and objectives
- Ask questions without fear of intimidation
- Understand confusing terminology and jargon
- Monitor the steps taken to reach program goals
- Assist their children in understanding program expectations and changes

## Problem Solving Know-How

Promoting positive, constructive parent advocacy begins with frequently publicizing the process for dealing with concerns.

Parents need to understand the steps to problem solving and feel that the administration is genuinely interested in responding to their concerns in a constructive and fair manner.

## What Is School-Based Management?

School-based management is a strategy to improve education by transferring decision-making authority from the state or school district levels to the local school. School-based management emphasizes shared decision-making between all stakeholders of the school – teachers, parents, community members, and even students – with the main goal of improving student achievement. School based management should also result in more efficient use of resources, greater creativity in program design, improved morale of teachers, and increased community and business support for schools.

In Georgia, local school councils exist to advise and make recommendations concerning policy issues. According to Georgia law, council decisions are subject to the review of the local board of education, and the principal is the leader of the school. The local school council provides a forum for the school, parents, and the community to discuss and make recommendations to improve student achievement. Although local school councils are advisory bodies, with proper training and direction, the council will have a positive impact on students and schools.

## Who Are the Members of Local School Councils?

The council is comprised of seven members – two parents or guardians of students enrolled in the school, two certified teachers, two businesspersons, and the principal. Parents or guardians of students enrolled in the school are eligible to serve as parent members of the council. If a parent is an employee of the school system and works at the same school their child attends, they are not eligible to be a parent member of the council.

# Helping Parents Become Advocates for All Children

## Learn to be Part of the Decision Making Process

Many parents view child advocacy as something done at the state or national level. However, many decisions concerning children and schools are made at the local school and district levels. Your PTA can encourage parents to have a voice in how their children's schools are run.

Check to see if your school district has a parent involvement policy that *encourages* parent involvement. If not, work with your school and community representatives to write one. Gather sample policies from other school districts. Find out the procedure for writing and implementing such a policy in your school or school district. (See Model Parent/Family Involvement Policy.)

Meet with your principal. Find out what school committees are active, and ask to have a PTA representative join them.

Encourage parents to serve on local and district advisory boards or school-based management committees. These groups are often responsible for setting school goals, developing school policies such as for homework or discipline, choosing curriculum and textbooks, and determining assessment methods.

Inform parents about the important issues in the school and community that affect their children's education. Make sure your PTA is represented at school board meetings and that school board actions are reported to PTA members. Make reports simple, direct, and free of expressions that members will not understand.

Provide leadership training for parents to help them work more effectively on committees, boards, and as a group. Contact social service agencies or adult education programs to find speakers or arrange workshops.

Work with your local civic organizations, business groups, and places of worship to set up a mentoring program to support and motivate students. Mentoring programs take many forms, including student internships in businesses, visits to the classroom by business people or professionals, and big brother/big sister programs pairing graduates with students.

Contact your state and federal representatives to learn about bills-pending or recently passed that promote the adoption of family-friendly policies by employers.

## Developing a Parent/Family Involvement Policy

*from National PTA's Building Successful Partnerships Presentation Kit*

A parent/family involvement policy should clearly communicate that parent involvement is an important strategy for increasing student success. All parent involvement plans and activities should be sensitive to the diversity of the school's population.

The policy also should state that the board of education, district administration, and the faculty are committed to helping develop and support school efforts to strengthen home-school partnerships. This is very important because administrators' as well as teachers' attitudes can determine how much and in what ways parents become involved in education. The policy should provide for the following:

1. Encourage professional development for teachers and staff on how to communicate with parents.
2. Involve parents of children at all ages and grade levels in developing the policy.
3. Encourage participation through outreach efforts to parents who might have low-level literacy skills or for whom English is not their primary language.
4. Recognize diverse family structures, circumstances, responsibilities, or differences that might impede parent participation.
5. Inform parents regularly about education program objectives and their children's participation and progress in those programs.
6. Form links with special service agencies and community groups to address any family and community issues.
7. List components of successful home-school-community partnerships. The policy should refer to the National Standards and incorporate opportunities for parents to become involved in all the areas covered by the six National Standards.
8. Allow for opportunities for parents to participate in how parent/family involvement programs will be designed, implemented, assessed, and strengthened.

### Model Parent/Family Involvement Policy

*This sample policy is based, in part, on the Parent Involvement Policy adopted by the California State Board of Education.*

The Board of Education recognizes that a child's education is a responsibility shared by the school and family during the entire period the child spends in school. To support the goal of the school district to educate all students effectively, the schools and parents must work as knowledgeable partners.

Although parents are diverse in culture, language, and needs, they share the school's commitment to the educational success of their children. This school district and the schools within its boundaries, in collaboration with parents, shall establish programs and practices that enhance parent involvement and reflect the specific needs of students and their families.

To this end, the Board supports the development, implementation, and regular evaluation of a parent involvement program in each school, which will involve parents at all grade levels in a variety of roles. The parent involvement programs will be comprehensive and coordinated in nature. They will include, but not be limited to, the following components of successful parent involvement programs:

- Communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful.
- Responsible parenting is promoted and supported.
- Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.
- Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought.
- Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families.
- Community resources are made available to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning.

The Board of Education supports professional development opportunities for staff members to enhance understanding of effective parent involvement strategies. The Board also recognizes the importance of administrative leadership in setting expectations and creating a climate conducive to parental participation.

In addition to programs at the school level, the Board of Education supports the development, implementation, and regular evaluation of a program to involve parents in the decisions and practices of the school district, using to the degree possible, the components listed above.

Engaging parents is essential to improved student achievement. This school district shall foster and support active parent involvement.

## Basic Principles of Advocacy Campaigning

In any advocacy campaign, there are several basic principles/themes that should guide your efforts. Keep these themes in mind as you begin developing your own advocacy campaign.

**DEFINE THE ISSUE.** Cast your issue in terms of the real, immediate, concrete improvements it makes in people's lives. Scope out the costs/benefits, both short- and long-term, and identify who will be hurt or empowered and how. Is the controversial new recreation center a way of keeping children off the street and providing young people a real alternative to joining gangs or is it a potential safety hazard at a high cost to taxpayers? Work with your PTA members to explore all the angles and determine which are the most sound and worthy of support. It is often wise to conduct a community-based needs assessment to determine what must be accomplished in your community and to involve all groups in the process.

**KNOW THE FACTS.** Before launching any advocacy campaign, you should do your homework and know the pros and cons of your issue, where key individuals and organizations stand, who the stakeholders are, and what information is available, forthcoming, or lacking.

**ORGANIZE AROUND GOALS.** Break big issues into short-term attainable goals to allow your progress to be measured. Goals should be action-oriented, clearly defined, and focused on what can be won. Goals should be achievable, not overly idealistic. Also, wins on small goals can be converted into larger victories on larger goals. For example, try to get solid endorsements from a dozen prominent community and state leaders before going to the whole City Council or State Assembly. Work to place a story defining your cause in the local newspaper before doing statewide media outreach. A small group of prominent supporters and a few solid news placements can be used to pressure other individuals and media outlets. When creating goals, focus on a series of connected events over a period of time in order to build a capacity to work together, to leverage your successes, and to give your unit a sense of its growing exposure and power.

**IDENTIFY TARGETS, TACTICS.** In developing an action plan, you should be able to describe the goals and objectives for each activity and also the audience it is intended to influence, the tactics to be used, how that tactic will affect your target, a range of potential outcomes, and a timeline for action.

**KNOW YOUR RESOURCES**. Identify who is available to help carry out your agenda and in what capacity, how much money you have, and what other organizations can provide support or access to target audiences.

**WORK AT ALL LEVELS.** Change occurs as a result of grassroots pressure from individuals, including parents, students, teachers, and business leaders. But change also can result from direct influence on and cooperation with decision-maker: the mayor, the city council, the governor, the school superintendent, a teacher union leader- simultaneously as you develop broad-based grassroots support.

**WORK IN STAGES.** Issue campaigns have a distinct beginning, middle, and end. Knowing the stages of a campaign can help you organize your efforts for maximum results, allowing you to define what you are doing, draw attention at the launch, reach out to other groups to draw support, and build momentum to peak at the right time.

**BUILD A SUPPORT BASE.** Survey the landscape. Determine where you are most likely to get support and what you will need to do to bring more supporters on board. Conduct events that actively involve your allies and give them credit for their help. Draw upon the good will of other groups and public officials and, where appropriate, keep them informed about what you are doing.

**HANDLE THE OPPOSITION.** If you bring an issue forward, you are likely to be stepping on someone's toes. Develop strategies that can strengthen your position when challenged. Gain en-

dorsements from those who are considered to be part of the opposition camp. Do not hesitate to debate the opposition. By sharing the stage with opponents, you have an opportunity to educate others about your views and win them over.

**TAP IN TO THE BIG PICTURE.** Your agenda may be part of a larger agenda for policymakers and the public. Be creative in showing how your cause supports, and may be a necessary step toward achieving, the larger agenda.

**DEVELOP MESSAGES THAT ATTRACT ATTENTION.** Selling support for children's issues is not the same as selling soap, but it requires salesmanship. Messages you develop need to tell people what is in it for them, why they should care, and what they can do to act upon their concerns. Messages should use data wisely, be supported by slogans and symbols, and be personalized. For example, opponents of the California school voucher initiative, including the PTA, called the measure "A Risk We Cannot Afford," asking voters if they would choose to send their children or any of the state's 5.6 million students to schools with unlicensed teachers and no academic safeguards. The PTA also used research to show there were not enough private schools available to meet current market demand, let alone future demand under a voucher system. It also developed messages that played on the voter's fears of growing tax increases, contending the measure was fiscally unsound and could create higher taxes and bankrupt the public schools.

**USE THE MEDIA TO ADVANCE YOUR EFFORTS.** Develop relationships with the print and broadcast media by becoming a credible source of comment and information and by staging newsworthy events, releasing information, and by taking positions with the support of your broad constituency base. Take advantage of all the media outlets available. Be active with the media. Meet with editorial writers, offer feature stories, prepare opinion pieces and letters to the editor, and offer spokespeople to respond to breaking news or to answer questions on radio and TV talkshows.

**CHOOSE THE RIGHT TOOLS.** Be aware of all the weapons in your arsenal. There are many different approaches and techniques that can be used to your advantage. Know what they are.

**DO NOT VIOLATE YOUR OWN RULES.** Make sure that the activities of your campaign do not conflict with the policies and guidelines of the PTA.

**BE ACTIVE YEAR-ROUND.** Do not merely operate during the school year. Keep PTA issues moving year-round so you do not have to rebuild momentum and start all over again.

**DO NOT BE EASILY DISCOURAGED.** Tenacity and the consistently shifting nature of politics and public opinion can bring ideas once off the radar screen directly onto center stage.

## Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families, and student learning.

As part of the larger community, schools and other programs fulfill important community goals. In like fashion, communities offer a wide array of resources valuable to schools and the families they serve.

When schools and communities work together, both are strengthened in synergistic ways and make gains that outpace what either entity could accomplish on its own:

- Families access community resources more easily;
- Businesses connect education programs with the realities of the workplace;
- Seniors contribute wisdom and gain a greater sense of purpose; and ultimately,
- Students serve and learn beyond their school involvement.

The best partnerships are mutually beneficial and structured to connect individuals, not just institutions or groups. This connection enables the power of community partnerships to be unleashed.

***To evaluate successful programs, ask "How well do we…":***

1. Distribute information regarding cultural, recreational, academic, health, social, and other resources that serve families within the community.

2. Develop partnerships with local business and service groups to advance student learning and assist schools and families.

3. Encourage employers to adopt policies and practices that promote and support adult participation in children's education.

4. Foster student participation in community service.

5. Involve community members in school volunteer programs.

6. Disseminate information to the school community, including those without school-age children, regarding school programs and performance.

7. Collaborate with community agencies to provide family support services and adult learning opportunities, enabling parents to more fully participate in activities that support education.

8. Inform staff members of the resources available in the community and strategies for utilizing those resources.

# Tips for Standard VI – Collaborating with the Community

## Employer Support

Innovative businesses have established policies that enable parents to support their children's learning more easily. Some are allowing parents to adjust work schedules to attend parent-teacher conferences or serve as volunteers. Other employers distribute school and program information or recognize employees who give personal time to support schools.

## Potential Partners

Within each community is a unique mix of organizations and service agencies that can offer valuable supports to parents and families. Consider the following partner categories:

- Businesses
- Chamber of commerce
- Charitable organizations
- Churches
- Civic groups
- Foundations
- Local government
- Local media
- Military groups
- Nonprofit associations
- Senior citizens
- Youth groups

## Community Service Learning

More and more schools are providing students with the opportunity to learn by serving in the community. From soup kitchens and clean-up projects, to volunteer activities in government and business, these hands-on student opportunities are especially powerful when linked to class discussions and curriculum objectives. In some cases where student skills have been linked to employee needs, not only have employers expanded opportunities for student learning, but their companies have also benefited. Through these programs, employers are able to complete important projects, while students benefit from new learning experiences in actual work settings.

## Best Ideas from Teachers

***Have students perform plays based on familiar fairy tales with well-known songs or nursery rhymes for residents of assisted living facilities.*** Having done this for many years, I know parents will make costumes and scenery. They will help their children learn their lines. They also donate sample bottles of lotion and shampoo for their children to give the residents. Parents also attend each and every performance. *From Mary Beth Roger, Kindergarten, Vanderlyn Elementary School, Dunwoody*

***Develop a community based inquiry.*** A community based inquiry provides a new way of accomplishing the traditional objectives or standards commonly associated with a research paper. The change from the traditional method required involvement of a student's community which largely involves parents. The resources developed for this type of project will direct students to examine their surroundings and uncover the stories of life, work, and culture in their community. The integration of community based inquiry into the curriculum emphasizes that our community is a living text with a gripping story to tell. A benefit of this teaching method is seeing the student's growing awareness that

their world is not singular in dimension and that in spite of the time and distance that may separate them from the characters and events in their text, there is a connection if they are willing to explore it. The process of identifying the inquiry subject and pursing answers to questions, integrates the student in the community in a process that guarantees an involvement that is active rather than passive. Those of us with any age on us, knows that living life provides knowledge that can be useful to others, this project encourages students to seek that knowledge from those who are more than willing to share. *From Maria Baldwin, Grades 9-12, Sequoyah High School, Canton*

***Have a "History Alive Day" on Veteran's Day.*** We invited parents, grandparents, and extended family of the students on our team who had served in the armed forces during any war or conflict, to come in and share. Parents were also invited to come in and assist with arts and crafts (flags made out of popsicle sticks, refreshments, and just general enjoyment of the day. We started the day with the high school ROTC raising the colors and the Star Spangled Banner was played by one of our own students. We proceeded into the cafeteria and listened as our history teacher asked a variety of interesting questions to our panel of veterans. Korea, Vietnam, and several political unrests were represented. Even 2-30 year veterans blessed us with their rendition of how wars "used to be fought." We even had a veteran from the special forces. A table was set up with "Show and Tell" items from the veteran's uniforms. While serving our country, one of our student's father was killed. She brought a glass case of his medals and a picture. We proceeded to the media center where the father of one of our students presented a multimedia power point presentation of the Gulf War and our military pursuit of Bin Laden. We went back to the team area to do a rotation of work shops: arts and crafts, history of military music with accompaniment, the reasons for, and the results of war, and the life and times of a woman marine in the Pentagon. Our students loved it, and learned a lot from it. *From Karen Lawrence, Grade 8, Dean Rusk Middle School*

# Action Teams

## What Is an Action Team?

It is an alliance among groups or individuals representing a group that bands together to deal with a concern or accomplish a goal more effectively than any one organization can alone. A task force is similar to an Action Team; however, it is designed to accomplish a specific task, is less formal in nature, and often more temporary than an Action Team. The suggestions concerning Action Teams in this guide apply equally to task forces.

## Why Build an Action Team?

Combining forces with other concerned groups or persons in your community will double or triple the visibility and effectiveness of any project your PTA undertakes. Why? Because in an Action Team each group/person has the opportunity to:

- **Share** information and resources
- **Gain** by tapping the other members' strengths
- **Develop** a network of skilled, knowledgeable, and concerned peers
- **Reach** a wider public with information on an issue and the coalition viewpoint
- **Rally** broader community support for an issue
- **Gain** allies who can present a unified voice on an issue
- **Accomplish** a goal which it could not handle alone

## Steps for Forming Action Teams, Creating Policies, Developing Action Plans

1. Create an Action Team
2. Examine Current Practice
3. Develop an Improvement/Action Plan
4. Secure Support
5. Provide School Programs and Professional Development as needed
6. Evaluate and Revise

### *Action Plan for Building Home-School-Community Partnerships*

Area of Parental Involvement Focus:_____

Activity:_____

Goal:_____

_____

Answer the following questions to help form the action plan:

1. What will be done?
2. Purpose of the activity?
3. Who will accomplish?
4. When?
5. What resources/materials will be needed?
6. What will be the training needs?
7. How will you evaluate activity?

## The Family Friendly Workplace

If there is no formal legislation in your state, urge businesses in your community to promote parent and family involvement in your community. Listed below are some options that employers can take, which has been adapted from *Employers, Families, and Education: Promoting Family Involvement in Learning*, published by the US Department of Education.

### Options For Employers:

1. **Create and promote policies that make it possible for employees to be involved. Such policies might address the following:**

   - Time-off for participation in school and child-care activities
   - Time-off for the first day of school
   - Beginning and end-of-day flextime
   - Lunch time flexibility
   - Work-at-home arrangements
   - Compressed work week
   - Part-time work
   - Job sharing

2. **Support employee parents through work-site programs. Such programs might include the following:**

   - Lunch time parenting seminars
   - Parent support groups
   - Education and parenting newsletters
   - Family resource libraries
   - Work-site based PTA
   - Literacy training
   - Parent hotlines

3. **Work to improve child care and schools through internal and community programs. Such programs could include:**

   - On-site child care or "satellite" schools
   - Child care resource and referral services
   - Child care subsidies, such as vouchers or discounts
   - Training, development, and accreditation for community child care providers
   - In-kind donations or pro-bono consulting to schools and child care facilities
   - School employee partnerships and volunteer programs
   - Advocacy

4. **Work with schools to help them better meet the needs of employed parents. Ways to work with the school may include:**

   - Parent volunteer programs
   - Employee friendly scheduling of school events
   - Improved parent-teacher communication through letters or voice mail
   - Interpreters for non-English speaking parents
   - Translation of parent materials
   - Family resource centers in the school

## Parent Involvement Increases Student Success

*From National PTA's Building Successful Partnerships Presentation Kit*

### Can I really make a difference?

Yes, when you are involved, your child achieves more.

How do I help my child succeed? You can help your child by providing a home that encourages learning and supports your child's physical, mental, and emotional development. And, you can help your child succeed by working with the school and other community groups that have an impact on your child.

What happens if I get involved? Decades of research show that when parents are involved students have:

- Higher grades, test scores, and graduation rates
- Better school attendance
- Increased motivation, better self-esteem
- Lower rates of suspension
- Decreased use of drugs and alcohol
- Fewer instances of violent behavior
- Greater enrollment rates in post-secondary education

## Ten Ways to Help Your Child Succeed

1. Let's talk – Talk with your child
2. Reach for the sky – Set high but realistic expectations
3. I'm OK, you're OK – Build your child's self-esteem and confidence
4. An apple a day – Keep your child healthy
5. Parents are the first teachers – Support learning at home
6. Getting connected! – Communicate with your child's school
7. Oh, the places we'll go! – Encourage exploration and discovery
8. Circle of friendships – Help your child develop good relationships
9. Stayin' alive – Keep your child safe
10. Can I help! – Participate in community service

The articles, tips and resources in the following sections present numerous ideas and suggestions that you can use to help your children succeed.

# 1. Let's Talk - Talk with Your Child

If parents talk early and often with our children, provide them with information and behave in ways that reflect their values and beliefs, children will come to parents first before going elsewhere for information.

### Strengthening Family Communication

Maintaining a loving and supportive family environment is the best measure parents can take to ensure the well-being and safety of their children. More than anything, children need to feel loved and appreciated through frequent displays of affection. Daily expressions of love create a trusting and caring parent-child relationship, strengthen children's self-esteem, and expand their ability to love and respect others. As a result, children and youth are less likely to be influenced by peer pressure or engage in negative behavior.

Communication is key to creating a loving family environment. When parents and children can express their feelings and concerns openly and honestly with each other, their respect for each other grows and the family bond is strengthened. Sometimes children need help in sorting out their strong feelings. Parents can gently encourage their children to express emotions by saying, "It looks like something is bothering you. Do you want to talk?"

Listening is perhaps the most important part of family communication. Research shows that parents have a greater impact on their children by how they listen than by what they say. Attentive listening helps children feel understood and valued and it can help identify and short-circuit conflicts before they erupt into full-blown problems.

Parents' actions always speak louder than their words. Children are constantly learning from their parents how to relate to others and deal with anger, frustration, and disappointments. When children observe parents expressing anger with verbal aggression or physical attacks, children are more likely to imitate this negative behavior. But when parents model positive and nonviolent behavior and are consistent in what they say and do, children are less likely to behave in aggressive or violent ways.

### Tips for Strengthening Communication

- Show love to your children often by hugging them or saying "I love you."
- Make time for your children every day and actively support their efforts. Praise their efforts often.
- Give your children responsibility that is appropriate for their age or abilities.
- Help your children set realistic goals. Encourage them to do the very best they can.
- Accept your children's feelings.
- Teach your children that anger is a normal and acceptable feeling. Encourage them to express anger using safe, effective, and appropriate ways such as telling another person they're angry, hitting a pillow, lying on a bed with their feet in the air and kicking their feet in the air while yelling "I'm angry," or running.
- Be an active listener by encouraging your children to express their feelings and thoughts, asking respectful questions to better understand their experience, and offering feedback and guidance rather than advice. Give your children nonverbal support and encouragement. Make eye contact.
- Help your children learn from their mistakes by asking questions such as "What can you learn from that?" or "What can you do differently next time?"

### At Home Activities

- Role-play with your children to practice how they would respond to peer pressure. For example, say to your children, "You are in the store with friends and one of them suggests stealing candy. What would you say and/or do?" Let them tell you what they would do. If they have difficulty, you can talk about responses to negative peer pressure (to steal, take drugs, etc.) that parallel your values and beliefs. Asking questions instead of "telling" works best: "If caught, do you think the store owner might have thought you were guilty just because you were part of the group? What do you think would have been the best way not to be associated with the person who took the candy bar?"
- Help your children find reasons for situations in which they don't want to take part.
- Help your children suggest other things to do.
- Help your children say "no" and mean it.

## Staying Involved in Your Teenager's Life

*by Elizabeth Cook, a psychologist in private practice in Westerville, Ohio*

Just when you thought you'd have more time to yourself, it takes even more time and energy to raise a teen. Emotional and physical separation from parents is a hallmark of adolescence and a necessary step in the adolescent transition to adulthood. Still, studies suggest that parent involvement is more important in academic success than socioeconomic status, racial or ethnic background, or education of the parents. So, parents often find themselves in a perplexing situation - How do they remain involved in the physical and emotional lives of teenagers who may not want their parents involved?

### Redefine how much time to spend with your teen

Because the involvement required by younger children would smother a teenager, the task facing parents of teenagers is to redefine involvement. What is appropriate given the developmental needs of their teen? What types of behaviors and attitudes would ensure continued involvement with a teenager and yet be tolerated and even welcomed by them?

To foster emotional growth and development, parents must transition from the dispenser of wisdom and absolute authority to that of consultant. Playing a secondary role - such as chauffeur, purveyor of funds, and final authority or consultants on curfew, destinations, and companions - may be a blow to the ego of the parent who was previously the central figure in the child's life; yet, it is necessary to recognize the changing developmental needs of the teen who must establish his or her own identity and begin to take charge of the world in which he or she lives.

It is important to value the "supporting role." Teens may insist on limiting parent involvement to being a non-intrusive presence during an event. That's OK. Just "being there" allows the parent to unobtrusively observe and to be available if needed. For instance, as the chauffeur you'll have an opportunity to get to know your teenager's friends and to learn of their interests and activities.

### Become active in parent organizations and volunteer at your child's school

While it may have been easy and acceptable to go through your child's backpack for grades, teacher comments, and times and dates of school functions, don't try the same routine when your child becomes a teenager. Parents must respect the teen's need for privacy. This is why sharing information with other parents becomes necessary.

Volunteering at school and attending PTA meetings are also means to acquire necessary information. Attendance at PTA meetings is greatest in elementary school and tends to taper off as the child moves

to middle and high school. It is often at the middle and high school junctures that directly communicating with other parents and teachers is one of the best, if not the only, way to remain informed about the daily activities of the school.

## Make yourself available

You do not always have to "do something" with your teen or plan an activity. Being available when the teen is likely to be around and inclined to talk is valuable. This will be perceived by the teen as less threatening, less intrusive, and less controlling. Availability in and of itself will provide a non-threatening opportunity for parents to stay connected.

While parents could look forward to at least an hour of "quiet time" after young children were in bed, teens tend to be on a completely different schedule. Allowing yourself to be around late in the evening may afford many opportunities to listen to your teenager.

Emphasis is frequently placed on talking with or even worse "to" your teen. To stay involved, concentrate on what they are saying to you, to siblings, and to friends. Listening must be nonjudgmental. Do not feel the need to instruct, point out, or clarify. Teens must figure things out for themselves, question assumptions, try different approaches; they are on their way to becoming independent adults. Talking too much may cause your teen to shut down; "just listening" encourages even more talking. An open and receptive approach will provide a better fit for the needs and developmental demands of teens.

# 2. Reach for the Sky - Set High, but Realistic Expectations

Taking some time to really look at our children and notice their strengths, talents, and interests, as well as areas where they need assistance, will help them develop realistic self-expectations, thus making them feel and be successful.

### At Home Activities

Ask your children what jobs they would like to have when older. If your children seem unsure, read the newspaper help-wanted ads with them, check out a library book on careers, and help them select three possible careers. Ask your children to explain their choices and the kinds of training or skills needed for each one. Respect and accept your children's choices. Next, encourage your children to talk with adults who hold jobs in their areas of interest. Talk with your children about what they learned from the interviews.

### Great Expectations: What's the Best Way for Parents to Help Children Be Their Best?

*by Patricia Sullivan*

All parents have similar dreams for their children. For some, it's dreams of their sons being NFL quarterbacks or architects. For others, it's their daughters growing up to be concert pianists or doctors. For some, it's being the first in their family to graduate from college. The common thread through all these dreams is children growing up to fulfill their parents' expectations of success. To some extent, all parents transmit these dreams to their children in the form of expectations. Many parents believe that transmitting a sense of high expectations to children is one way parents infuse them with confidence, self-esteem, and personal standards of merit and value. But too much expectation to succeed can be crushing, in some cases as destructive as telling children they're not good enough. The key is balance.

Expectations fall into two main categories: behaviors and accomplishments. Behaviors are the character traits parents want their children to develop or exhibit, such as good manners, ambition, diligence, and responsibility. Accomplishments usually are either academic or recreational, in activities such as athletics, art, or music that are supposed to be fun and enriching. Knowing what should be expected of a child at any given age is a good start toward setting reasonable expectations. Reasonable expectations of a 4-year-old, as opposed to a 12-year-old, are very different; for example, while a parent might reasonably expect a 12-year-old to sit quietly through a movie in a theater, anyone expecting that from a 4-year-old is in for a rude awakening.

#### That special something

"Parents need to be realistic," said William Sears, a pediatrician and parenting educator. "Identify your children's special something. What are they good at? What are their skills? Create an environment that fosters them," he said. In this way, "You can have expectations because you know they're good at that one particular thing."

Setting these realistic expectations based on a child's strengths will go a long way toward building the kind of confidence that is essential to long-term successes. "I'm a firm believer in setting up a child to succeed," said Sears, the father of eight.

Parents need to consider what it is that they want for their children and whether how they act on those expectations will actually help their children achieve those goals. All parents want their children to

grow up to be happy, healthy, and strong. Setting high expectations is one way many parents think they are working toward those goals. But if children are pushed to perform at levels for which they aren't ready, the result will be the opposite of what parents want. Instead of developing confidence, children may become afraid of taking risks, for example. Instead of being proud of their accomplishments, children can begin to feel like sources of disappointment for their parents.

"You have to set reasonable standards," said Janine Bempechat, author of *Against the Odds: How "At-Risk" Students Exceed Expectations*. "They should be high, but not too high," or else children will become frustrated from not being able to meet them, she said. "Set goals that are just a little out of their reach. You wouldn't take a beginning skier up the chair lift," Bempechat said. "Start them out on the bunny hill. The important thing throughout childhood is to foster a love of learning."

**Listen up**

Children will let parents know when they're overwhelmed, either directly or indirectly. "They'll tell you if [something's] too hard for them," Bempechat said. When parents hear children say something like "I hate reading", that's a very clear sign to step back. According to Bempechat, the goal is for children to be self-motivated, so proceed slowly and listen carefully to what they are saying.

"Don't make assumptions about how smart they are," she said. For example, don't push children into "gifted" programs when they may not be gifted at all. "Look, everybody who wants to go to college is going to go to college," Bempechat said. "Keep that spark of curiosity alive - that's what will be destroyed if you push them to do things they aren't ready for."

Not all psychologists and pediatricians believe that setting high expectations is good for children, particularly if those expectations are unrealistic. "The assumption is that [without expectations] children will end up lying on the floor in a puddle. But only kids who are depressed and miserable will," said Martha Pieper, a clinical social worker who, with husband William Pieper, a psychiatrist, has written *Smart Love*, a book on parenting. And depressed and miserable kids, she said, are more likely to be those who are trying to live up to unrealistic expectations set by others, or trying to accomplish goals set for them with little or no input of their own. What's important, Pieper said, is "growing up with an inner happiness that's really secure."

Parents should build on children's strengths and offer support, Pieper said. "Let children struggle as long as they're happy struggling," she said. "If they're uncomfortable, show them you'll help them when they ask. You want to offer positive, helpful encouragement."

**What is success?**

"Let's face it," Sears said, "We're living in an age where success is measured in economics and success is considered happiness." It's easy for parents to get carried to extremes, he said. "If your child is starting to rebel, you have to back off."

The skills most essential to success aren't academic ones: "It's the smartest kids who often fall apart at the first sign of failure. Being smart isn't necessarily going to help you. But knowing how to pace yourself, how to keep going when you're completely stuck, and how to ask for help will."

The overriding concern parents have in setting expectations is their children's future success. But those expectations can have a negative effect if parents don't teach children the lessons they need to negotiate life. It's those life lessons - not academic knowledge or recreational skills, but qualities like diligence, perseverance, and responsibility - that will have the greatest effect on their lives. Parents need to remember that making sure their children acquire those skills is more important in the long run than whether a child gets an A on a report card or wins a swimming meet.

# 3. I'm OK, You're OK – Building Your Child's Self-Esteem And Confidence

As children act independently, make choices and mistakes, they learn and grow. Thinking positively about accepting our children unconditionally as they move through this process helps them develop a positive self-concept.

### At Home Activities

As a family, make a point of looking for one another's achievements and commenting on them. When a family member sees another member doing a good job, trying hard, or learning something new, recognize the latter person with a special family dinner or by doing an activity that the person enjoys.

## Helping Children Like Themselves

- Be a good role model. Let your children know that you feel good about yourself. Be human with your children. If they see that you, too, can make mistakes and improve yourself because of them, they will be able to accept their own mistakes and use them as learning experiences.
- Clearly define and enforce limits and rules.
- Show respect and allow for individual action on the part of your preteens and teens within these given limits.
- Reward teens when you can. Give praise, recognition, a special privilege or increased responsibility and freedom for a job well done.
- Accept your children as they are. Don't expect them to fit into your mold for them.
- Take their ideas and emotions seriously.
- Make a wide range of activities available for your children so that they can find the talent or activity that they enjoy and do well.
- Encourage activities that make your children feel good. These might include photography, handicrafts, or working in the garden. At times they need to do something that makes them feel better. Allow them time for activities such as skipping stones, playing games, talking on the phone, making paper airplanes, reading sports magazines, or watching people.
- Teach your preteens and teens how to deal with money. Help them budget the money they have now so that they can budget larger quantities when they're in college or working. Teach them to spend an allowance wisely, balance a bank account, fill out tax forms and take care of the odds and ends of budgeting.
- Have reasonable expectations for your children. Give them goals they can accomplish. Success breeds success!
- Concentrate on improvement, not perfection. Give encouragement with each step.
- Help your children develop tolerance toward those with different values, backgrounds, etc. Give your children the responsibility of helping others. They will feel more useful and more valued.
- Be available. Give support on a task when they ask for it. Make sure they know that you will help if they want you to help.
- Let them know that you value and care about them.
- Show them that what they do is important to you. Talk about their activities with them. Remind them of the special things they have done. It is more important that they be reminded of the good things than of the bad.
- Tell your children they're terrific and that you love them. Sometimes, especially during adolescence, they don't hear that from anyone else.

# 4. An Apple a Day – Keep Your Child Healthy

It is important for children to come to school emotionally, physically, and socially healthy. When children feel good about themselves, are well rested, and well nourished they are more ready to learn.

### At Home Activities

Plan time for family activities like playing outdoor games, going for bike rides or walks, or taking in a funny movie. Take out a family membership at the local YMCA, go bowling or swimming. Laugh and have fun.

## Building a Healthy Child

There is nothing more important to parents than the health and welfare of their child. And healthy children mean successful students, which is why PTA supports comprehensive school health programs. While parents are a child's primary health educators, comprehensive school health education provides age-appropriate health information in each grade. For children to receive clear and consistent messages, good health habits need to be reinforced at home, in school, and in the community.

Parents then share the responsibility of ensuring their child's well-being with teachers, the community, its members and all its services. Learning the facts about various health concerns is key to this common effort. Presentations and written materials can give a firm base of understanding of the issues, but often adults - and children - need a way to practice or apply the information they've learned. That's where *Building a Healthy Child* comes in.

*Building a Healthy Child* provides interactive health activities for children in grades K-6. Based on topics identified by a nationwide survey of PTA members, this kit contains 10 easy-to-use, low-cost activities that offer adults an opportunity to discuss with children topics critical to their health. This kit was developed in consultation with the American School Health Association and can be ordered from the National PTA.

## Physical Activity: Getting Your Kids Off the Couch and Moving

*by Kate Wicker, MCG Children's Medical Center*

Weight problems are plaguing American's children and adolescents. A lack of exercise coupled with poor eating habits is making our kids fat. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the rate of obese children in the United States has doubled in the past 30 years—a trend that could get worse if we don't start encouraging healthy eating and get our kids off the couch and moving.

By helping young people and the people who influence them understand that physical activity is an important part of a lasting, healthy lifestyle, waistlines should get thinner, and our kids will be healthier.

And believe it or not, exercise can ward off obesity and be fun at the same time. Use these tips to get kids and teens moving today.

• **Make physical activity part of kids' daily routine.** For instance, encourage children to walk or ride their bike to school (make sure they wear a helmet when riding their bikes!).

• **Allow less time for watching television and using the computer.** Suggest other activities like playing sports, walking the family dog or riding bikes.

• **Encourage participation in sports or recreational activities.** If your child doesn't already play a sport, let him or her try out everything from swimming to gymnastics to more traditional sports like baseball or softball. Most kids will enjoy the physical activities, meet friends and may even find a lifelong hobby. If your child isn't interested in sports, you can still encourage a more active lifestyle. For example, if your child loves science, suggest going on nature walks at local parks.

• **Advocate for physical education classes at school.** In recent years, gym class has been scaled back. If your child's school is cutting back on physical education classes, start asking why. Form a committee and share your opinion on why P.E. classes and even recess time are very important given the lack of physical activity in today's children.

• **Be an active family.** Kids learn from example. If you spend your evenings in front of the tube, chances are your children will turn into couch potatoes, too. Try to enjoy more vigorous activities as a family. Garden together. Ride bikes. Go on walks before or after dinner. Run around the house and act goofy. Any activity that gets you and your child's heart rate up is better than just sitting around.

By following these simple guidelines, you can help keep your children from packing on the pounds and prevent the risky medical problems that accompany obesity.

## Preventing Obesity in Children with Healthy Eating

*by Kate Wicker, MCG Children's Medical Center*

With the prevalence of obesity in children and teens increasing and with more kids merely exercising their thumbs while playing high-tech video games, the need for promoting physical activity is great. But a lack of exercise is only a part of the problem. Parents, health care providers and communities also need to address the problem of poor diets.

According to Karen Cota, a pediatric dietician at the MCG Children's Medical Center, today's kids are not eating as healthy as they once did with the advent of dual working parents, fast food and quick snacks from vending machines. "With both parents working, families often pick up fast food for dinner on the way home from work or on the way to an activity or sports practice," Cota says. "Kids aren't eating vegetables with meals, and therefore are eating more higher calorie starches and meats."

Cota points out that school cafeterias often have vending machines open during lunch where kids can easily access high calorie snacks or soft drinks and fruit juices high in calories and sugar, which can wreak havoc on a diet.

Parents have a responsibility to encourage healthy eating and should realize the risk factors for heart disease, such as high cholesterol and high blood pressure, more frequently occur in overweight children and adolescents compared with children at a healthy weight.

The following suggestions can help parents and other community members keep their children at a healthy weight:

- "Parents can make healthy eating a priority with their children by setting a good example and being healthy themselves," says Cota. "Make healthy food choices, increase vegetable and fruit intake, eat less fried foods, drink sugar-free beverages or water, don't buy high calorie, high fat snacks and read labels for adequate portion size to prevent overeating."
- Prepare healthy snacks for children and teens. Cota suggests baby carrots, cucumber slices or green peppers dabbled with fat free dip, pretzels, half of a bagel, string cheese or one portion of light popcorn. Apple slices with cinnamon or peanut butter is another delicious treat!

- "Kids need to limit junk food to very small portions, one to two times per week. If we include all the foods we need to eat like whole grains, lean meat and fruits and vegetables, then we should feel too full to eat much else," Cota says.
- Cota recommends checking out healthy recipes in books like *Food For Tots* by Dr. Janice Woolley and Jennifer Pugmire (written for parents of kids ages one to six) or *Helping Your Child Lose Weight the Healthy Way* by Judith Levine, R.D., M.S. and Linda Bine, a good option for dealing with older children.
- Make sure that your child's school incorporates healthy choices into its cafeteria meals and vending machines. Encourage the school and other community organizations to provide safe, fun and recreational activities that require physical activity.
- About 43 percent of adolescents watch more than two hours of television each day. "Parents need to encourage activity, allow less TV and computer time," says Cota. Suggest other activities like riding bikes, playing sports or walking the family dog.
- Consult your doctor and other health care professionals to determine whether your child or adolescent's weight is healthy, and they can help rule out uncommon medical problems that can cause weight gain.

Most parents want the best for their children. That's why promoting healthy habits at a young age is so critical. Communities and health care and education organizations can help parents and children by making health and disease prevention a priority.

**Resources**

- Growth Chart and Body Mass Index Charts can be found at www.cdc.gov/growthcharts. These charts show ideal body weight based on a child's height, and the BMI charts can be used to assess obesity or the risk for obesity.
- The Surgeon's General's Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity is available at http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/topics/obesity.

## Help Teens Kick Butts

*by Kate Wicker, MCG Children's Medical Center*

Despite a decrease in the overall number of smokers, every day more than 6,000 adolescents under the age of 18 smoke their first cigarette, and more than 3,000 become daily smokers. Clearly, the need for education and for the implementation of programs to help smokers quit is still great.

Although cigarettes may temporarily make smokers feel good both physically and emotionally, if young smokers were taught more about the consequences of using tobacco products, maybe they would think twice before having a smoke. Research indicates that when teens are told about the potential harms of smoking by people they care about, they are less likely to start smoking.

So what should you teach children about smoking? For starters, the message needs to be clear: despite the chic girls flashing smiles in Virginia Slims advertisements or Joe Camel's jaunty smile, smoking won't make you any cooler or happier. Instead, it might kill you. And if it doesn't destroy your lungs, the habit is expensive, makes you stink, tarnishes your fingers and teeth and affects your ability to perform in sports.

Parents and caregivers also need to talk about how addictive tobacco products are to people. The majority of first-time smokers are not planning to make a lifelong habit out of smoking. However, even after the health risks, bad breath, foul-smelling hair and yellow-stained fingers and teeth begin to bother smokers, a slave to tobacco often finds the habit difficult to break. This is because tobacco's main element is nicotine, a highly addictive substance.

Fortunately, many programs exist to make the process of quitting smoking easier. Although health care providers may not seem a likely resource, they often offer smoking cessation programs and sincerely want to help their patients quit smoking.

"I'll see someone as many times as it takes and for as long as it takes, until they quit smoking," says o, Dr. Robert Pendergrast, a physician at the MCG Children's Medical Center. Using nicotine replacement patches, prescriptions as well as other methods, Dr. Pendergrast works with teenagers to help them quit smoking. "My job is not to be the police or parent," Dr. Pendergrast explains. "My job is to be the doctor and to help a teen who wants to quit smoking, quit."

In addition, the American Cancer Society offers the Freshstart program, which provides support and education for smokers trying to quit. "Everybody knows they should quit smoking," says Ginger Moseley, a facilitator for the Freshstart classes at MCG. "But it's much more difficult to actually find the motivation to quit. Freshstart can help."

The impact of nicotine addiction is staggering. Tobacco use is the leading preventable cause of death in the United States - the key here is preventable. Teens who have never smoked shouldn't start. And those who smoke now should quit. Imagine breathing in fresh, clean air and living a long, happy life. With support and education we can make this vision a reality for our youth.

Visit the American Cancer Society's website at www.cancer.org. For more support, visit www.quitsmokingsupport.com.

## The Importance Of Immunizations

*edited by Christopher B. White, MD, Professor in Pediatrics, MCG Children's Medical Center*

The best way for parents to keep their children healthy and prevent disease is through immunization. The idea behind immunizations is to infect the individual with a small amount of a disease, to which the body responds by developing cells to fight and kill any future invasions of that specific disease. Immunizations are a preventative step against full-blown diseases that could prove dangerous to your child. In the state of Georgia, children are required to be immunized for certain diseases before they enter day care. Specific vaccination forms are required when your child is entering school, which are provided by local health departments or your family doctor. Other immunizations are recommended for children as they continue to grow. The typical age when all immunizations should be complete is 16 years.

There are ten diseases that all children in the United States should be immunized to prevent. They are chickenpox, diphtheria, Haemophilus influenzae type b, hepatitis B, measles, mumps, pertussis, polio, rubella, and tetanus. Additionally, young infants (less than 2 years old) should be immunized against pneumococcal infections and influenza. The chart on the following page lists the vaccines that children currently receive in Georgia. In the future it is likely that some of these vaccines will be combined in order to decrease the number of injections. If you are unsure when your child should be immunized, you can contact your doctor or health department. If you would like to know more information about childhood immunizations, the following Internet site is an excellent resource:

http://www.immunizationinfo.org/parents/index.cfm.

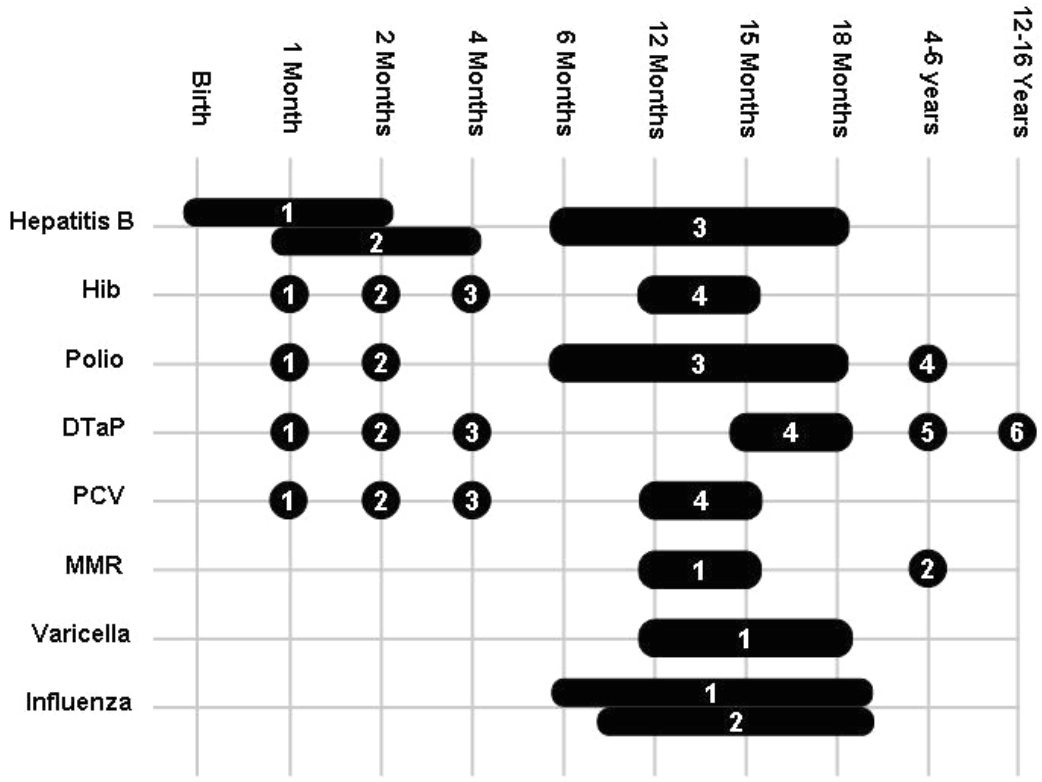
**Important Immunizations for Your Child**

| | |
|---|---|
| *DTaP~* | prevents diphtheria, pertussis, and tetanus |
| *Hep B~* | prevents Hepatitis B |
| *Hib~* | prevents Haemophilus influenza type b infections (meningitis) |
| *Influenza~* | prevents influenza (the flu) |
| *MMR~* | prevents measles, mumps, and rubella |
| *PCV~* | prevents pneumococcal infections (meningitis, pneumonia) |
| *Polio~* | prevents poliomyelitis |
| *Varicella~* | prevents chickenpox |

## Recommended Childhood Immunization Schedule

*by Christopher B. White, MD, Professor in Pediatrics, MCG Children's Medical Center*
*(Based on the Immunization Schedule recommended by the CDC, American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American Academy of Family Physicians)*

A circle means that the vaccine should be given at that age. A bar means that it may be given at any point over a period of time. For example, the first dose of polio vaccine should be given at 2 months, but the third dose may be given at any time between 6 and 18 months.



# 5. Parents, the First Teachers – Support Learning at Home

In today's changing economy the need for advanced skills and technical knowledge is growing. Showing our children that we value learning and education is important and will pay off in the long run as they mature.

### At Home Activities

The next time your children have a project at school, help them with the following:

- Determine the nature of the assignment: Is it a report, a model, etc.
- Decide what tools are necessary to complete the assignment – a textbook, library research, etc.
- Break down large projects into manageable steps and decide the order in which things need to be done.
- Determine how much time is needed to complete an assignment by creating a timeline.

## Motivating Minds: Nurturing Your Child's Desire to Learn



Every child is born with a desire to learn. Indeed, most children enter kindergarten excited about learning to read and write, and eager to know about the world around them.

Yet by the time they reach middle school (and often before), many children look upon learning as drudgery, not the exciting opportunity that propelled them when they were little. The idea that learning can be fun all but disappears - as illustrated by a boy who thanked me for a gift of *Tom Sawyer*, then added, "I'll read it next fall. I already did my book report for this semester."

If you've noticed a lack of motivation in your child, you're not alone: research shows that American children's love of learning declines steadily from 3rd through 9th grade. It doesn't have to be that way.

Every child is born with a healthy measure of internal motivation to learn. As children grow, this inborn desire to learn can continue like a raging river, a gentle stream, or a tiny trickle. Sometimes it simply disappears into the mud. But you needn't sit back and watch your child's enthusiasm for learning vanish. You can have a child who looks forward to a history project or a chemistry experiment with the same thrill of anticipation she feels before the latest Disney movie or her league championship basketball game.

### Connecting School to the Real World

Children's enthusiasm flourishes when they realize that school learning explains the world and equips them to deal with it successfully. Unfortunately, school learning seems irrelevant to most kids today. If you don't believe me, try this experiment. Ask your school-aged child these three questions about any assignment:

- Why do you think your teacher wanted you to do this?
- What will you learn from this assignment?
- Can you think of a way you'll use this knowledge or skill outside of school?

It's likely your child will look at you with a puzzled expression. Most kids can't even explain what skill they're learning, let alone its usefulness outside the classroom. When asked why they're doing an assignment, they usually answer, "Because the teacher told us to." But children are delighted when they discover that a concept learned in school explains an everyday experience. I remember my

daughter Meredith enthusiastically explaining to me the pH of shampoo, and why we sometimes get a shock when we turn on the lights in dry weather.

Of course, before you can help your child see the relevance of schoolwork to life, you have to know what your child is studying. If you ask your child what she is learning in school and she doesn't answer, ask her to show you her math homework or where she is in her social studies text. Don't hesitate to ask her teacher what the class will cover in a particular month, or for a general sketch of this year's topics. You needn't know every little detail, just enough to help you make the school curriculum meaningful to your child.

Once you know what your child is studying, you can help her connect it to everyday experiences. Here are some ways to do that:

***Connect Science Learning to the Natural World***

- If your 2nd-grader is studying weather, ask him if you should take your umbrella when you go out on a dark cloudy day, and why dark clouds predict precipitation. Ask him to predict whether it will snow during the night by tracking the temperature on the outside thermometer throughout the evening.
- If your daughter is studying the earth and the solar system, watch a sunset together. Ask her where the sun is going. If you call from a trip in another time zone, ask her why it's earlier where you are.

***Link Social Studies of History to Current Events***

- If your son is studying the westward movement of European Americans, tell him about a local Native American tribe's request for gambling rights on their land.
- When your daughter is studying municipal government, show her a newspaper article on the budget cutbacks causing a reduction in local library hours or the elimination of the bus route she takes to her piano lesson.

***Connect Literature to Real-Life Experiences***

- William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, the 1996 movie with Claire Danes and Leonardo DiCaprio, perked teenagers' interest in Shakespeare by portraying the tragedy as a conflict between youth gangs. You can make similar connections between the books your child is studying and his own experience, or a news event.
- If you don't have time to read the book, rent and watch the movie together after he's read it.

***Point out Math Applications in Daily Life***

- Show a 5th- or 6th-grader how proportions are used to compute baseball batting averages, or how you have to add and divide fractions to double or halve a recipe.
- If you go to Canada or Mexico on vacation, involve your child in figuring out currency exchanges.

## Make Connections that Are Meaningful for a Child

"You need to learn how to add and subtract to balance your checkbook," won't mean much to a 2nd-grader. And your 11-year-old won't get excited about learning about the human circulatory system because "someday she may want to be a doctor."

Stay away, too, from general cheerleading like, "You'll need to know this when you're a grown-up" or "I know you don't see now why you should learn this, but I know you'll be glad you did." Such well-meaning but abstract statements are more likely to elicit groans rather than to pique interest.

## Expand School Learning

Another way to bring school learning alive and lend it personal meaning is to enrich your child's experiences, such as by taking her to museums, aquariums, farms, and historic sites. (Virtual visits to a website count, too.)

Here are a few examples of things you can do to infuse your child's school curriculum with the color and fullness of reality:

- If your daughter is studying a local Native American group, take her to a museum or mission.
- If she is studying state government and you don't live too far from the capitol, take her to a senate debate, or help her find on the web some bills on a subject that interests her.
- If your son is studying marine life, take him to the beach to explore the tide pools, or to an aquarium.

Everyday experience enhances school learning too. You may not realize it, but those trips to the park, to a city, and to Grandma's house, and the pet turtle or fish your child has in his room, all help him relate to what he reads and learns.

By the way, don't rule out the possibility that your child is already interested and even passionate about a school subject. Sometimes it's obvious, as when your son blabs on and on about the Egyptian-style mural he's drawing for a social studies unit. Sometimes the teacher will tell you which subjects rouse the most enthusiasm in your child.

But frequently you need to do a little investigation. First, ask your child what subject she likes at school, or what she's learning that's interesting. If she replies "nothing" (as many children will), it's time to put on your Sherlock Holmes (or Nancy Drew) hat:

- What subjects does she mention at home?
- What topics does she ask questions about?
- Which homework assignments does she always do first?
- Which ones does she show you?
- What books does she choose at the library?

Try expanding first on a subject that already grabs your child's interests. With the pilot light already on, you'll be sure to get an enthusiastic response.

While it's good to make school curriculum relevant for your child, you don't always have to start with the topics your child is learning in school. You can also help your child maintain his zest for learning by developing his own intellectual interests—and work with his teacher to spark and fan the flames.

## Easy-to-Use Ideas for Fun Family Activities

There are many activities and projects that families can do together. Here are some low-cost, or no-cost, fun projects that involve children with their families. As you consider these ideas, feel free to adapt and change them to meet the needs of your family. Add your own, too! These activities are simply a starting place for entertaining things to do together.

- **Make a family book/story -** Take some time to make up or retell a story in which every member of the family adds a part. Write this story out, or record it on tape if you (you could even video tape your story). You can draw illustrations for your story and share your "book" with others.
- **Grow things** - Plant a garden that you all share as a family. You don't need outdoor space to do this. You can use pots or even an aluminum foil pan to hold the dirt and seeds. You don't even have to buy seed if you find ways to save seeds from the foods you eat. It's a great experiment to see what will and will not grow this way.
- **Measure your family -** Use a tape measure or ruler to record the heights of everyone in your family. Total the inches to see how "tall" you are altogether! Do the same with your family's weight (as long as everyone is willing to reveal the numbers!). Create a story or poem about the combined person that your family is when heights and weights are added together.

- **Map your home or block** - Help your children draw a map of each floor of your house or apartment. Pretend to be a bird flying overhead and use that view for drawing. Do the same with your block, indicating where others live and how to get from one place to another.
- **Make up your own sporting events/Olympics** - Use household chores as the basis for Olympic sporting events. Have everyone participate in the "Olympic laundry folding" (rate difficulty from towels [easy], to shirts [difficult]). The "dishwashing marathon" can be a special event with the winner (whoever washes the most) being eliminated from this event! Combine events to create a triathlon. Consider room cleanup, with dusting and bed making! Other combinations will do.
- **Go to a local high school sporting event** - These are usually free or inexpensive and will familiarize the entire family with a school program. They are also lots of fun to watch!
- **Bake something to give away** - Make cookies or a casserole with everyone participating, and then give the results to an elderly neighbor or to a soup kitchen that feeds the homeless.
- **Review a TV movie with your family** - Watch a television movie or rented video as a family. Bring popcorn and turn out the lights while it's on! When done, have each family member give the film one, two, three or four stars. Will you all agree?? Who picked this movie, anyway?!
- **Help someone else, as a family** - Check in your area for programs or projects that help families in need. Look for opportunities in which your entire family could volunteer together. Perhaps you can help cook and serve in an area soup kitchen or fix up and paint houses or for the elderly or low-income families in your community. Maybe you could clean up a park area or build a playground. Find something that will make a difference for others with your entire family participating.
- **Cook with your children!** - Let your children choose the recipe, and discuss the importance of reading the directions before you begin.
- **Have a family session of "Who Remembers?"** - Use family photos, home movies or videos and allow each person to tell what he or she remembers about an event or picture.
- **Make a map with your children** - Using a big piece of paper, draw a map of an often-visited place, such as the zoo, a local park or a shopping area. Together, label the important spots and write or draw directions to find them.
- **Go to a museum** - Find an exhibit you have never visited. Figure out the three most important parts of that exhibit.
- **Take a family trip with your children as "navigators"** - Use a road map with your children and have them mark off departure and arrival points. Have them watch for road signs along the way. If they can, let them estimate the miles and time left for the trip.
- **Talk to your child!** - Set aside at least 10-15 minutes each day in which you really listen to what your child says. Be positive about what is being shared.
- **Write your own label** - Use the cereal boxes in your home as examples of what a label tells people. Now, together, write a label for your own imaginary box of cereal.
- **Listen to animal sounds** - As you and your children walk and travel in your neighborhood, listen for sounds made by animals who live there (birds, squirrels, etc.). See if you can learn to identify them by their sounds.
- **Take a "field trip"** - Use your neighborhood and community and accompany your children to a special "travel site." It could be a bus stop, a train station or even an airport. Talk about where you think different people are going and what they will do when they get there.
- **Feed the birds** - Put up a bird feeder that can be viewed from your window. Watch for different kinds of birds with your children. Get a book to help identify them and their habits.
- **Demonstrate "greater than, less than"** - Talk with your children about what makes something "greater than" or "less than" something else. Compare things that can be counted such as ages of people, numbers of cars or trucks, and things that can be seen easily.
- **Practice adding money** - Help your children understand the value of money. Ask which is greater; two quarters, three dimes or four nickels? Help your children to add up different amounts.
- **Explore your public library** - Find out what your library has to offer besides books. View videos or listen to cassettes with your children. Locate atlases and large maps

- **Talk about important issues** - Be sure to talk with your children and teens about drug and alcohol abuse. Listen to their views and share your own.
- **Learn a new card game** – Get out a deck of cards and learn a new game. Your library should have books with game rules and activities.
- **Find alternatives to TV** - Limit television viewing during the course of a week. Have the family select shows to watch together and talk about why they would choose one over another. Make a list of things you all can do, other than watching TV.
- **Create family poetry, stories and rhymes** - Using old, well-known rhymes, have the family write new ones. Let one person start and each member add a line. Write "family" poems and stories in the same way.
- **Stay organized and on schedule** - Help your children keep track of things with a monthly calendar that covers events and activities for the whole family. Have your children fill in these important details on the calendar.
- **Collect junk mail** - Let your children open and read these pieces of mail. Talk with them about the content and what they are being asked to do.
- **Prepare for emergencies** - With your children, make a list of all important emergency telephone numbers. Be sure to include the names and numbers of neighbors and relatives that the children can call when you're not at home
- **Build vocabulary** - Whenever you come across a new, unusual or interesting word (on a sign, in a book or magazine, in the newspaper), talk with your children about it. Discuss meanings and how each of you might use (or might never use) it.
- **Visit an art museum or an art fair/show** - Look at the different styles of art and the many different materials (media) that are used. Talk with artists, if you go to an art fair, about how their own styles change over time and why.
- **Practice good health habits** - Talk with your children about what should be done on a daily basis (bathing, brushing teeth, brushing hair, etc.). Set family "healthy habit" goals, and reward family members who achieve them with something silly, but appropriate, like the Golden Carrot award!
- **Trace your family tree** - With the help of your children, list all the members of your family going back as far as you can. Get help from your relatives. Using a large piece of paper, draw a tree and then attach the family names as leaves on the tree.
- **Talk good nutrition with you children** - Look in your refrigerator and cabinets and categorize the foods into three groups: nutritious foods, junk foods and "unknown." Discuss what would make an "unknown" closer to one category or another and how it might fit in!
- **Rate your family's TV watching** - For a week, have family members rate each program that they watch on television with either one, two, three or four stars. Meet at the end of the week and review everyone's ratings. See if this can lead to a reduction in what is being watched.
- **Design a family crest or logo** - Use crayons to draw it on T-shirts. After the drawing is done, place the shirt between newspaper or brown paper bags and iron over the wax. The colors will remain permanent and will not wash out.
- **Have your teen plan a family outing** - Give him or her guidelines to follow that consider the needs of all family members (such as movie ratings, skill levels of activities, budget constraints).

# 6. Getting Connected! – Communicate with Your Child's School

Frequent communication with your children's teachers and school is the key to academic success. Attending parent-teacher conferences, school events, and PTA meetings, and sending notes or e-mail messages to pertinent school staff helps foster good relationships that support your children's learning.

### School/Community Activities

Use the following guidelines for more productive communication anytime with teachers or principals:

- Identify the purpose of your call or meeting. Call, email or write a note to the teacher letting him or her know you wish to meet and why.
- Share your schedule with the teacher and suggest that the conference be arranged at the teacher's convenience.
- Plan for the conference by writing out clear and specific questions you want to ask (e.g., How does my child interact with others in group activities?)
- Summarize each important point made to be sure there is mutual understanding of things discussed.
- Get specific suggestions on how you can help improve the situation. Thank the teacher for talking with you.
- Do the activities suggested until progress in noticed, and stay in touch with the teacher about changes you see.

## Parents as Learning Partners: At Home and in School

*by Barbara N. Kupetz, associate professor of education in the department of professional studies at Indiana University of Pennsylvania*

A child's learning experiences begin in the home. At birth, children and their parents become learning partners. They play together, talk together, learn and discover together, read together, and explore the world. Parents provide encouragement, give approval, or offer instructions and suggestions when needed.

From a child's first day of life, parents provide messages both spoken and unspoken that help children learn. Many opportunities exist to teach children important lessons about caring for others, setting goals, completing tasks, and helping others. The messages parents send are powerful. The activities in which parents and children come together to support the learning that takes place before and during formal schooling are examples of the many ways in which they become partners in learning. Parents continue to be the most influential teachers their children will encounter.

But often, once children begin formal schooling, parents begin to relinquish this role. Some believe that teaching and learning belong in the classroom and should be the responsibility of professionals. After all, that's what teachers are trained to do—teach. Others feel inhibited because of their own feelings of inadequacy.

The start of children's formal schooling should not mean the end of their parents' role as partners in learning. Rather, it's an opportunity to continue the learning partnership already established in the home. Now activities and shared learning experiences might revolve around the school day, school projects, and school events but can still strengthen the family learning partnership.

Not only can families' learning partnerships continue when children go to school, they can also expand each time parents take part in school activities. Whether it be parent-teacher conferences, involvement in the PTA, or volunteering in your child's classroom, parents have many opportunities to further learning with their children.

Today, schools and teachers encourage the active involvement of parents in classroom activities. It's clear that with home and school working together, not only is learning enhanced, but children also receive important messages regarding the importance of education.

Working together means much more than simply giving one's time. It means offering children the chance to see that education is something that occurs outside the walls of classrooms as well. It shows that learning takes many forms, that it occurs for young and old alike as a lifelong process, and that it can happen among many individuals, not only classroom teachers. It shows that classroom learning is a continuation of the parent-child learning partnership.

Some parents find getting involved with their child's schooling difficult. They want to help, want to support their child's learning, but don't know how or when to begin. Perhaps they are a little intimidated by the whole idea of working with the trained, professional teacher. Perhaps they are afraid they won't know what to do, or that they'll do something wrong. These are all legitimate concerns that many parents have. But parents should not let this frighten them off. They should never forget they are already teachers, already their children's learning partners.

When schools reach out looking for parent involvement, parents must sign up. Parents who are curious about what's happening in their children's classroom need to pick up the phone and call the teacher for an appointment. When schools have a parent volunteer program and call for more participants, or the next time a PTA meeting is being held, parents have to make the effort to participate. All of these kinds of involvement represent cooperative efforts with teachers and schools, and they are all important to parents' role as learning partners with their children. Parents mustn't shy away from opportunities to expand the scope of these learning partnerships. As their children's first teachers, they are always an important part of their education. Parents have to realize that they can always make a difference in how their children learn. After all, they've been doing it since their children were born.

## How Parents Can Stay Involved with School

- Get to know all your child's teachers, not just one. Let the child's teachers know that you expect your child to do well in school and would like to know when your child is not doing well. Introduce yourself to the principal and guidance counselor as well. Do not wait for a problem to arise. Make the first meeting a positive one.
- Collect and carefully read information on school policies, procedures and curriculum. The school may have a handbook that contains this information.
- Review your child's records and test scores each year. This will give you a clear indication of how your child is doing in school.
- Monitor your child's academic performance on a regular basis, especially in subjects that he/she has had difficulty before or is below grade level. Be prepared to ask teachers and counselors for help if needed.
- Ask for periodic parent-teacher conferences.
- Communicate with your child about each problem that develops. Then, contact the appropriate school staff person to help you resolve it.
- Check any special education placement. If you have a question about whether it is the best decision for your child, get some expert help. Ask if there is an advocacy program for parents of special education students.
- Become acquainted with other parents and form support or parent action groups to work on problems or issues of mutual concern.
- Respond to notes and other communication from school. Be sure to ask your child if there are any messages from school.

## Tips for Participating at School

- Let the teacher know you are interested in volunteering in the classroom. Drop the teacher a note or make a call to express your interest. If you do it early in the school year, the teacher will remember your interest and notify you when help or support is needed in the classroom. Remember, teachers welcome both moms and dads in the classroom!
- Decide on the amount of commitment you are willing to make. Let teachers and school personnel know whether you are interested in trying to volunteer on a small scale, or whether you are interested in participating regularly one, two, or three hours a week.
- Consider your talents, skills, and hobbies, and focus on these areas. Perhaps you love mathematics. Or perhaps you've been trained in computer skills. These abilities could be offered to children in the classroom. Many parents have rich cultural traditions that they could share with students. Some parents may not have any particular training, but that doesn't mean that their experience as learning partners with their own children wouldn't be helpful to other children as well.
- Discuss your visit with your child. Share your feelings about your classroom involvement with your child. Your positive attitude about working with your child's teacher and classmates is extremely important and sends a message that interest and participation in learning is critical. It's important for children to know you participate in school and classroom activities because you value learning. But what about volunteerism? This is a perfect time for your child to learn one of those important messages you teach by example. The message you send regarding community involvement and the importance of sharing one's time and talents is a wonderful lesson for your child.
- Give the teacher feedback. If you enjoyed the experience, let the teacher know. Just a short note will indicate to the teacher that you'd like to be involved again in another classroom project. You, your child, and your child's teacher will be glad you did!

# 7. Oh, the Places We'll Go – Encourage Exploration & Discovery

The world is your children's oyster. By encouraging your children to develop their interests and seek out opportunities to try new things you help them make the most of the world around them.

### School/Community Activities

Buy a chemistry set for your children and try simple experiments at home. Plant a garden together. Encourage your children to build with blocks and tinker toys. Go for walks in your neighborhood, a park or forest preserve, or go exploring in your backyard for bugs, worms, different kinds of rocks, leaves, flowers, etc. Visit your local public library or art, history, science or children's museum, and inquire about children's programs they offer. Take out a library card in your child's name. Consider a family membership or take advantage of discount and free days at museums.

## Rethinking Children's Play

*by Diane E. Levin, Ph.D., professor of education at Wheelock College in Boston, Massachusetts*

Educators and child development experts have long emphasized the importance of play in childhood. Many parents and teachers are expressing increasing concern and confusion about the role of play in the lives of children growing up today.

### Why is play so important for children?

Has something changed in society and childhood in recent years that is affecting play? Is there really cause for concern and, if so, what can the adults who care for children do about it? Why is play important? Play is vital to most aspects of children's social, emotional, and intellectual development and academic learning. It is one of the most powerful vehicles children have for trying out and mastering new skills, concepts, and experiences. Play can help children develop the knowledge they need to connect in meaningful ways to the challenges they encounter in school - for instance, learning literacy, math, and science, as well as how to interact positively with others. Play also contributes to how children view themselves as learners. As they play, they resolve confusing and disturbing social, emotional, and intellectual issues. They come up with new solutions and ideas and experience the sense of power that comes from being in control and figuring things out on their own (something children often do not get to do in real life). This helps develop a positive attitude toward learning - about how to find interesting problems to work on and how to solve them in creative ways. Play is a dynamic and endlessly diverse process.

Every individual child's play evolves and changes over time as children mature and gain experience and skill. Play also varies among children based on age, their experiences (which provide them with the content they bring to their play), family background and cultural group, and individual disposition.

### All play is not the same

Not all play is equally valuable; the degree to which it promotes growth is affected by how and what children play. The more play is a creation of children's own imaginations, abilities, experiences, and needs and the more they are in control of what happens as they play - as scriptwriters, actors, prop people, producers, and directors - the more likely they are to get the full benefits. Alternatively, the more children flit from activity to activity and from toy to toy and their play involves mimicking and imitating someone else's behaviors and scripts, the less likely they are to develop the full range of positive skills and attitudes that creative play can provide.

## Changing times

Many factors in the environment influence how children play - how much time they have for play, the experiences they have that provide the content for their play, the attitudes of adults toward their play and what adults do to promote it, the role of television and other media in their lives, AND the nature of the toys they use in their play.

Many of the changes in childhood that have occurred in recent years are undermining the quality of many children's play. "Playtime" is being shortchanged in school as more emphasis is being placed on teaching "the basics" at younger and younger ages and on high stakes testing. Many children and parents have busy lives so there is less free time for play out of school. For safety and economic reasons, the neighborhood play culture that existed in many communities is becoming a thing of the past.

When children do have time to play, they often choose to watch television instead - an average of four hours a day - not to mention the additional time they spend watching videotapes or playing video games. But of all the factors affecting play today, few have had a more worrisome impact than changes in toys in the past decade or so.

## Changes in toys

Toys have a very big influence on play. Some toys tend to promote higher quality play than others. Multi-purpose and unstructured toys, like clay, blocks, generic toy figures and baby dolls, encourage play that children can control and shape to meet their individual needs over time. Highly structured or realistic toys, like action figures based on TV programs and/or movies, as well as many video games, can have the opposite effect. They "tell" children how to play and can channel them into playing particular themes in particular ways - merely using the toys to try to imitate what they see on the TV or movie screen. Most of today's best-selling toys fit the highly-structured, media-linked side of things.

This phenomenon of media-linked toys arose very dramatically in 1984 when children's television was deregulated by the Federal Communications Commission. Deregulation made it legal to market toys to children through TV programs for the first time. Almost immediately, and ever since, whole toy lines of realistic replicas of what children see on the screen have appeared. Television shows, and increasingly movies too, are made to sell toys and other products to children. Often, what is frustrating to parents and children alike is that while the age recommendation on the toy box is for children as young as ages 4 or 5, the show connected to the toy has a rating for much older children.

To the extent children's toy shelves become dominated by these highly-structured toys, their play and learning can suffer. Still worse, because many of the most popular shows linked to toys have violent themes, what children are often channeled into imitating is violence.

## Changes in play

When children become dependent on toys that tell them what to play and show them how to do it, they use their playtime to imitate other people's scripts. As a result, their imagination, creativity, and ability to find interesting problems to explore and solve - the very foundation that contributes to children's success in school - can all be undermined.

Over time, children can become increasingly dependent on toys to show them how to play and have a harder time creating their own play or using open-ended toys, which they can control. Many children quickly become bored when they do not have things that show them what and how to play. They also turn to television and video games more and more as a way to deal with their boredom.

## What parents and other adults can do to promote play

Parents and schools can do much to help children develop play that supports their social, emotional, and intellectual development. Here are some suggestions to help parents and caregivers facilitate a healthy sense of play in children. Pick and choose those tips that seem the most appropriate. Some efforts may work better than others. Try to remember that the goal is to build upon and enhance the play, not to take control of it away from the child.

- **Encourage and value play that is appropriate to the age and individual interests and needs of the children.** Help children bring content from their own direct experience into their play. Children's play is usually more creative and less imitative when it grows out of their daily experience. Watch children as they play to see what they are working on and what interests them. This can help provide ideas about what play materials and other input might help further develop the play.
- **Choose new toys carefully**. Toys that can be used in many ways usually promote the most valuable play. They give children many opportunities to invent new uses for them over time. Too many toys or a constant barrage of new ones can prevent children from doing this.
- **Find ways to interact regularly (but not always) with children as they play**. Getting involved with children as they play, as long as it is not so heavy handed as to interrupt or take over, can provide a gentle way to facilitate the play. It can also show children that adults value play.
- **Try to have regular, uninterrupted playtime in a child's life**. Whether play time is three or five times a week, after breakfast or before bedtime, this tells children that play is important and valuable. It also helps them develop the skills they need over time to become involved in meaningful and satisfying play. For children who are heavily dependent on television, develop this routine gradually and help children figure out how to begin their play.
- **Create and equip environments that help children get started with and sustain meaningful play**. Organizing toys so children can easily see what is available, get what they want, and put them away can help them become independent and resourceful players. Put popular toys in clearly marked containers (with pictures) on easily reachable shelves.
- **Work to counteract the gender, racial, and cultural stereotypes and violence that characterize many toys**. Stereotypes limit children from developing their full potential. Children sort out who they are and similarities and differences among people in their play. Keep this in mind when choosing new toys and try openly talking with children about these issues when they come up. When children do engage in violent, imitative play based on TV shows or movies (or use the toys connected to them), help them bring into the play their own ideas, creativity, and imagination. Adults have differing ideas about this kind of play. Some try to ban it; others take a laissez-faire approach. Most kids, especially boys, do try it out in some form. However adults view this kind of play, the more they can help children's play become creative, the less violent it will be.
- **Make thoughtful choices about the role of media in children's lives**. What and how much children see in the media can have an enormous impact on their play. Television time takes time away from play activities. Media content greatly influences the play. So, try to play an active role in managing the media in children's lives; for example, develop rules about screen time and screen content.
- **Work with other parents, teachers, and the wider community to create an environment for children that supports creative, productive play**.

While it is unfortunate that in today's world of increased time constraints, parents and teachers need to take a more active and deliberate role in ensuring that children's play meets their needs, in the long run their efforts will pay off. Children will demonstrate increased levels of independence, resourcefulness, and competence as a result of creative play.

# 8. Circle of Friendships – Help Your Child Develop Good Relationships

All children want to fit in, be accepted, and feel like they belong. Helping your children develop good relationships can have a positive impact on their future development.

### School/Community Activities

Help your children think about the qualities people look for in a friend. Ask your children, "What do you think people look for in a friend?" Write down important qualities you and your children identify. Select the three qualities each of you feels are most important in a friend; compare and discuss them. (You do not need to agree on them.) Brainstorm ways to help your children develop the three qualities they felt were most important in a friend.

## Helping Children Make Good Decisions

### The facts

- Adolescents have the highest proportion of seat belt non-use (83 percent) of any age group involved in fatal motor vehicle crashes.
- Each year more than 1 million adolescents become pregnant; an estimated 87 percent of these pregnancies are unintended.
- Clearly, teens and preteens are making important decisions every day. Some are as simple as what to eat; others are as complex as whether to go to college or become sexually active. Many of these decisions are made with limited knowledge or without careful thought. Often decisions are made for the wrong reasons: in order to be liked or to "prove" something or as an act of rebellion. Sometimes teens may not even be aware of how or why they make decisions. Parents often don't recognize the symptoms of stress in their adolescents. Identifying the symptoms and learning coping mechanisms are important steps in helping their teens to respond well to stress and to reduce excessive amounts of stress.
- Parents can help their teens learn decision-making skills and put those skills into practice. To do so parents need to explore decision-making processes, their own family values, and their children's goals and interests. Parents also need to learn ways to help their children develop decision-making skills.

### There are several steps to successful decision-making:

- Recognizing that a decision needs to be made.
- Gathering information to help make the decision.
- Identifying alternative decisions.
- Examining the potential outcomes of the alternatives.
- Considering how the alternatives fit with personal values and goals.
- Recognizing poor reasons, such as peer pressure, a desire to prove maturity or feelings of rebellion, for choosing certain alternatives.
- Making a decision.

### Tips for parents

- Give your children opportunities to practice making decisions. For example, choosing the site of a family outing or dividing the chores fairly.

- Show your children how to weigh their options, gather necessary information and consider alternatives and potential outcomes of their decisions. You can show this to your children even in simple decision-making situations such as deciding what clothing to wear.
- Help children understand that decisions have consequences both for themselves and others. For instance, a teen might decide to take up smoking because it looks "mature" without considering that smoking carries a variety of consequences including yellow teeth, smoker's breath, an expensive habit and increased risk of cancer and heart disease.
- Show your child that not making a decision when one is needed can be as bad as making the "wrong" decision. Your teenage son can't decide whether to rent a black or white tuxedo for the prom. In the meantime, all the tuxedos are rented and now he must buy one.
- If you are not sure what kinds of decisions your children are mature enough to handle, give them the chance to try making some decisions. Be supportive, friendly and ready at - hand to save the day, if necessary. This will help you and your children know what they are ready to do for themselves.
- Accept your children's decisions. Remember, no decision is perfect. Support your children's ability to make decisions.
- Understand that many of your children's decisions will be based on their personal tastes and needs and therefore may not match the decision you would have made for them.
- Lay ground rules or limits for decision-making. If a child wants to do something that is clearly harmful or unacceptable, explain why you cannot allow him or her to act on that decision.
- Remember, the ability to make decisions helps improve self-esteem. Children who can exercise some control over their lives are being prepared to be responsible and happier adults.

# 9. Stayin' Alive – Child Safety

By identifying potential risks and giving clear instructions to your children on how to avoid such risks, children can side step danger by knowing what to do in threatening situations. Talking to children about safety also increases their understanding of violence and the need for practicing behaviors.

### School/Community Activities

Share a story about a situation in which you felt threatened or unsafe. Describe how the incident made you feel; share what you said or did; tell your children whether you got help, how, and from whom. Discuss what else you could have done or what you could have done differently. Ask your children how they might respond to this type of situation or ask them to share a similar experience they have had at school, on the playground, or in the neighborhood.

## Safeguarding Your Children at School

*From* Helping Kids Handle Conflict, *National Crime Prevention Council in association with National Association of Elementary School Principals*

### 1. Helping Children Deal with a School Bully

Bullying is often considered a "kids will be kids" problem. According to the National School Safety Center, however, bullying has become a pervasive and serious form of harassment in many schools. Dr. Dan Olweus, a professor of psychology and leading expert on bully-victim problems, reports that one child in 10 is regularly attacked either verbally or physically by bullies. Elementary school-age children are the most frequent target of bullying by older students. The best way to safeguard your children from becoming a victim of a bully is to teach them how to be assertive. This involves encouraging your children to express their feelings clearly, to say no when they feel pressured or uncomfortable, to stand up for themselves verbally without fighting, and to walk away in more dangerous situations. Bullies are less likely to intimidate children who are confident and resourceful.

### Profile on Bullies

The following are traits common to bullies:

- They are concerned with their own pleasure rather than thinking about anyone else.
- They want power.
- They are willing to use other people to get what they want.
- They feel hurt inside.
- They find it difficult to see things from someone else's perspective.

### Tips for Helping Children Deal with Bullies

- Teach your children early on to steer clear of youth with bullying behavior.
- Teach your children to be assertive rather than aggressive or violent when confronted by a bully. Instruct them to walk away and get help from an adult in more dangerous situations. Practice various responses with your children through role-playing.
- Teach your children to never defend themselves from bullies with a gun or other weapon.
- Keep communication lines open with your children. Encourage your children to share information about school and school-related activities.
- Pay attention to the following symptoms that may indicate your child is being bullied: withdrawal, abrupt lack of interest in school, a drop in grades, or signs of physical abuse.

- If your child is a victim of bullying at school, inform school officials immediately. Keep your own written records of the names, dates, times, and circumstances of bullying incidents. Submit a copy of this report to the school principal.
- Respond to your children's concerns and fears with patience, love, and support.

## 2. Teaching Children How to Avoid Sexual Harassment

According to a study conducted by the American Association of University Women, one-third of children surveyed said they experienced sexual harassment in 6th grade or earlier. Six percent of students surveyed related experiences that occurred before the 3rd grade. Sexual harassment is a form of violence that encompasses a wide range of offensive behaviors. These include touching, pinching, grabbing, and patting; comments about one's body; degrading graffiti on walls and bathrooms; sexual remarks, gestures, and jokes that demean others; passing obscene notes; and spreading rumors. Peer-to-peer sexual harassment is one of the most widespread forms of violence in schools today. A recent study conducted by the American Association of University Women reported that 81 percent of girls and boys have experienced unwanted sexual advances. Because many of these behaviors are dismissed as flirting, few students report incidents of sexual harassment to teachers or parents.

Young harassers learn their behaviors from adults, peers, and the media. Parents can model and teach their children to respect the rights, bodies, and property of others, and to reject gender stereotypes that say boys are expected to be dominant and aggressive while girls are expected to be passive and submissive.

### Tips for Avoiding Sexual Harassment

- Talk with your children about the difference between flirting and sexual harassment and give examples of each. Make sure your children understand that sexual harassment is a form of violence and that it is illegal.
- Be alert to any of the following symptoms in your child: chronic anxiety, concentration problems, withdrawn or depressed behavior, insomnia, body image problems, fear of going to school, or wanting to drop courses. Discuss concerns with your pediatrician, family practitioner, religious leader, or mental health worker.
- Encourage your children to tell you about any incidents that make them feel bad, embarrassed, scared, or uncomfortable. Keep a written record of the circumstances and submit a copy to the principal.
- Request to see a written policy on sexual harassment at your children's schools. If a school doesn't have a policy in place, work with other concerned parents and staff to establish one.
- Meet with the school principal to gain support for a sexual harassment prevention program in your child's school.
- If you report an in-school sexual harassment incident to school officials without getting results, contact your state department of education to file a formal complaint**.**

## 3. Protecting Children from Gang Influence

Gang activity and gang violence have become serious problems in urban areas and are rapidly spreading into suburban and rural communities as well. Gang members often engage in vandalism, theft, assault, and the sale of drugs in schools as well as in the community. As a result, many schools have become centers of violence and fear rather than safe centers for learning. Children and youth join gangs for a variety of reasons: the need to belong, low self-esteem, peer pressure, boredom, academic failure, and lack of employment. The American Psychological Association reports that gang members are as young as 9 and as old as 30, and males outnumber females by 20-to-1. However ominous the threat of gangs may seem, parents can prevent their children from joining. The support and nurturance children receive at home enable them to make good decisions and to find alternatives to gang involvement.

## Tips for Protecting Children from Gangs

- Spend time with each of your children every day. Show affection and make them feel special and important.
- Contact your local police department to find out if any gangs are active in your community.
- Children are attracted to gangs by their offer of friendship and support. Start teaching your children early - from age 4 or 5 - that gangs are dangerous and do not provide positive support or positive role models.
- Teach your children what to do if gang members approach them. The best response is to walk away and tell an adult.
- Know your children's friends and families and your children's whereabouts at all times. Set definite curfews for your children.
- Children with a history of academic failure are at high risk for gang membership. If your child has learning difficulties, work together with his or her teachers. Seek help from tutors and guidance counselors. Help your child with his or her homework.
- Be on the lookout for signs of possible gang involvement: change in a child's friends, change in dress habits (such as wearing the same color combination all the time), secrecy about activities, flashing hand signs, having income from unknown resources, having symptoms of alcohol and other drug use, and having a diminished interest in the family and school. If you notice these signs, contact your school principal or guidance counselor, juvenile justice workers, or law enforcement personnel.
- Keep your children active in sports, clubs, volunteer work, and family and community activities.

# 10. Can I Help? – Participation in Community Service

Your children's knowledge and talents, while nourished in the classroom, are recognized when put to good use. Children learn valuable lessons when helping others through volunteerism and community service.

### School/Community Activities

Participate in a community service project as a family. Some ideas include donating clothes and food to a community clothing or food drive; participating in a neighborhood project to clean up a park, a river, or heavily littered sites in the community. Assist in planning a community garden on community parkways.

Talk to your child's teacher for more ideas on what you can do at school or in the community to help your child succeed.

## Learning to Lend a Hand: Fostering the Volunteer Spirit among Children

*by Ted Villaire*

The September 11th tragedy in New York City and Washington, DC, taught many people - adults and children alike - how their volunteer efforts could help fulfill urgent needs within the country. Cynthia Sherer, vice president of youth outreach at the Points of Light Foundation, saw an immediate outpouring of money and time. "The service people received helped heal them," said Sherer, who works for the largest national organization that works solely to encourage volunteerism. "It reminded us of the power we have when we give ourselves to others."

Sherer wasn't surprised by the great number of young people who responded to the events of September 11. Contrary to what many adults may think, she said, youth volunteerism is on the rise. According to surveys, more than half of teens put time toward volunteering each year. Surveys also show that these young people have formed their own definition of civic engagement and see volunteerism as the most effective way to make important social changes, noted Sherer. Some of the more popular types of volunteer activities for young people, according to Sherer, involve issues affecting other young people, such as teen pregnancy and youth violence. Also common is working with senior citizens, working on environmental projects, and working with animals.

For parents who want to see their child participating in community service, the key is to help the child find an activity that he or she finds meaningful. It will help the process along, explained Sherer, when parents understand that many of a child's interests can be translated into a good volunteering experience. And once a child is matched with the right project, the child will likely encounter a gratifying mix of personal, social, and academic benefits.

### How volunteerism benefits children

Many researchers point to the positive effect volunteerism has on a child's self-esteem. The boost in self-esteem seems to occur when children are taking on new responsibilities, said Robert Wuthnow, author of *Learning to Care: Elementary Kindness in an Age of Indifference*. Successfully taking on new responsibilities and seeing themselves as caring people will help children "understand that they have the strength to make a difference in their worlds," said Wuthnow.

When kids work on projects in the community - whether they're cleaning a polluted stream or helping out at a drug prevention program for teens - they will widen their understanding of social problems and the people who are affected by them. Working with people who are living in poverty or people who have mental or physical disabilities will dispel any notions a child may have that people who are different from them are threatening or unworthy of consideration. A great benefit for children performing volunteer work, say experts, is the development of a deeper understanding of the needs and desires of others.

Given the sense of motivation and accomplishment engendered during a good community service experience, it can be expected that children participating in such programs will develop better academic skills. Researchers also point out that community service may lead to improvements in a child's problem solving and critical thinking skills.

Along with gaining academic skills, studies suggest that children who volunteer will likely have a better idea of their career direction. If a child is interested in becoming a physician, he or she could put in time at a hospital and become acquainted with people in the profession. By volunteering in a prospective career, a child will discover whether he or she is truly interested in particular career path, and very likely will receive some guidance on how to pursue career goals.

## Choosing a volunteer activity

In a good volunteer activity, students are engaged in work that is meaningful both to themselves and to the community. According to Diana Mendley Rauner, author of *They Still Pick Me Up When I Fall*: If kids are not benefiting from the work or if they feel their efforts are used simply as menial labor, it can be a dispiriting experience that will likely result in a cynical attitude toward volunteering.

In order to encourage the best possible volunteer experiences for children, the Points of Light Foundation has established a set of guidelines for organizations and programs that enlist the efforts of young people. Many volunteer programs, of course, will not be able to answer yes to all of the questions below. Still, the more a program reflects these guidelines, the more likely it will be a better experience for a child:

- Does the activity meet a real need in the community? Is another coat drive necessary when three schools are already collecting coats?
- What are the kids getting out of it? There should be learning goals for the children and they need to be involved in identifying these goals.
- Are the children involved in the development and planning for the volunteer work? Children need to be involved in selecting the work that they do.
- Are young people given adequate training and an introduction to the work? If children are helping with a literacy program, for example, they should be taught tutoring skills, and they should be introduced to literacy as a wider issue.
- Is the activity well-planned? Along with work that is meaningful and adequately supervised, consideration should be given to liability issues, transportation, and back-up plans that may be needed if, for example, an outdoor activity is rained out.
- Are there opportunities for reflection? To get the most out of community service, kids need a chance to explore their reactions and express what they've learned.
- Is feedback requested afterward? Asking for feedback helps create improvements.
- Do kids have a chance to celebrate their efforts? This will help keep them coming back.

## Getting kids involved

Whatever strategy parents use to spark a child's interest in volunteering, the goal is igniting an intrinsic motivation in the child and avoiding any type of coercion. This could be easy work if a child already has passionate feelings about certain issues and just needs help transferring this enthusiasm into a related volunteer project. With some children, it may be helpful first engaging them in conversations about social issues. Once they're having regular discussions about issues, it's natural to start talking with them about how the family can help. Parents may want to explore with their children how certain skills and interests could be a springboard to volunteer action. If an older child is involved in athletics, he or she could consider serving with a community sports program for underprivileged youth. When a child doesn't seem to have any interests that can be translated into volunteer work, a parent may motivate the child by addressing the values and interests of his or her peer group.

By far, the most effective method for getting kids to participate in volunteer activities, say researchers, is for parents to serve as models for their children. Kids will be more inclined to commit themselves to volunteering when they see community service as a natural extension of the family. Some parents say participating in volunteer activities with their children can make their relationship grow. "For a kid working alongside the parent as a peer, it's an empowering experience and allows parents and children to renegotiate their relationship," said Rauner, noting that this may be particularly valuable during the teen years.

When parents are trying to instill the value of volunteering in their children, Rauner stressed that getting them motivated sometimes can be difficult. Part of the challenge, she explained, is that there are so few places in the culture where children will hear a message promoting the practice of caring for others through community service. Rauner also recommended that parents have a clear understanding of the principal reason for children enlisting in volunteer efforts. The primary objective, she said, is not boosting a child's self-esteem, nor is it just teaching kids that it feels good to help others. The larger goal, she said, is helping kids acquire a sense of responsibility for their community and helping them to see the value of participation.

# ESEA Implement Guide – The Next Step Is Yours

*Prepared by National PTA, Washington, DC Office, May 2002*

After years of deliberation and negotiation, Congress reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which President Bush signed into law on January 8, 2002. The ESEA law, P.L. 107–110, also known as the "No Child Left Behind Act," will affect children in every school district in America.

First enacted in 1965, ESEA includes more than 40 federal programs to help states, districts, and schools improve elementary and secondary education. The 2002 ESEA law significantly expands the role of the federal government in requiring accountability for student academic achievement, and sets new demands on state agencies and local school districts regarding teacher quality and school improvement. The law also contains many National PTA-initiated provisions strengthening parent involvement policies and practices.

PTA leaders have a unique opportunity, and indeed a responsibility, to help ensure that the law is implemented effectively. In fact, parents must be active in ESEA implementation to make sure the benefits of the improved parent involvement and strengthened accountability provisions are realized.

National PTA has developed this guide to assist you as a parent, a PTA leader, or a community stakeholder and encourage your activism in the implementation of ESEA. Please know that you are not expected to be an expert on every ESEA program, or to cover all the issues in this document. Feel free to use this information to suit your local needs and interests. Share this guide with other PTA advocates and ask them to join you in the ESEA implementation process.

Coordinate use of this guide with activities you are already undertaking at the state and local level, and focus on those aspects of the law most relevant to your communities. For example, information from this resource can be shared at PTA events, at community town-hall meetings, or at candidate forums you organize in your district.

Work with other education advocates in your areas who are involved in ESEA implementation. In general, the Chief State School Officer or the state superintendent of schools, along with their staff of experts in your state departments of education, will be your critical contacts in trying to get information about state ESEA implementation activities. If you are not sure how to contact officials in your state education agencies, look to www.ed.gov/Programs/bastmp/SEA.htmor call the National PTA Washington, DC office at (202) 289-6790.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

At the school district level, your superintendent will be the contact for ESEA implementation, and the superintendent's office will be able to get information for you from state education officials when needed. Other school administrators in the district office may be assigned to specific issues, such as parent involvement, Title I, or supplemental services. If you do not know where to start at the district level, ask the principal in your local school for assistance. In addition, telephone directories may have special lists of school system contacts.

***Background:***

When states and districts apply for ESEA funds, through programs such as Title I, teacher quality, or Safe and Drug-Free Schools, they must develop plans. In ESEA, states and districts must identify certain parent involvement activities in these written plans, and in some cases involve parents in the planning process. In addition, for the first time, ESEA defines the term parent involvement, and the defini-

tion is based on National PTA's own National Standards for Parent and Family Involvement Programs.

***Questions to ask at the state level:***

- Who should parents contact to get a copy of the state's plan with regard to parent involvement and training teachers how to work with parents?
- How did the state involve parents in the development of these plans?
- How can PTA leaders be active in the process?
- What process will states use to review districts' parent involvement policies?
- What types of technical assistance will be provided to schools having difficulty implementing parent involvement practices?
- How will the state use education technology to foster parent involvement?

***Questions to ask at the school district level:***

- Who should parents contact to get a copy of the district's plan with regard to strengthening parent involvement and training teacher how to work with parents?
- How will the school district involve parents in the development of these plans?
- How can PTA leaders be active in the process?
- How will the district work with schools to implement parent involvement activities?

***Questions to ask at the local school level:***

- What is the school's budget for parent involvement, and is it sufficient?
- What parent involvement resources are available at the school?
- Where can one get a copy of the school's parent involvement policy?
- How can parents get involved in their children's schools?

***For more information:***

- National PTA's parent involvement resources, including a copy of the National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement: www.pta.org.ptawashington/issues and www.pta.org/parentinvolvement
- Partnerships for Family Involvement at the U.S. Dept. of Education: http://pfie.ed.gov or call (800) USA-LEARN.
- National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education: www.ncpie.org or call (703) 359-8973.

## ASSESSMENTS

***Background:***

The ESEA law builds upon provisions adopted in 1994, which required states to develop challenging academic and performance standards, and assess if their students are meeting them. The law now requires that states develop annual assessments for children in grades 3 through 8, in math and reading by the 2005–06 academic year. In school year 2007–08, states must add a science assessment. All students must participate in the assessments, and test results must be "disaggregated," meaning they are reported to show student progress among all subgroups, according to race, gender, socio-economic status, disability, and English-language ability. States will devise "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) standards, and if they are not met, schools will be subject to sanctions and corrective actions. These sanctions will take effect as early as 2002–03 for some schools.

***Questions to ask at the state level:***

- How is your state ensuring that districts are using curricula aligned to the state standards?
- Do the state tests adequately measure performance on meeting the state standards and are they scored in a way that allows for all students to meet the proficiency standards?

- How has your state defined "adequate yearly progress," which will be the measure of a school's performance and the trigger for sanctions and punishments?
- Is the proficiency standard reasonable and attainable within the 12 year limit?

***Questions to ask at the school district level:***

- Are test data in your school district disaggregated by population subgroups to show how all students are performing, including by economic status, as now required?
- Do school district officials notify parents about the numbers and percentages of students in their schools who are meeting the state standards?
- What responses are in place in districts to assist students who are not meeting the state's proficiency standards?

***Questions to ask at the local school level:***

- What is the schedule for tests in the school and how much instruction time is sacrificed for testing and test preparation?
- Do teachers work with parents to help them prepare their children for the required tests?
- How are parents informed about the school's testing policy and procedures, and are communications in a language parents can understand?

***For more information:***

- Developing Educational Standards: http://edstandards.org/Standards.html
- National Center for Fair & Open Testing: www.fairtest.org/index.htm

## STATE AND SCHOOL REPORT CARDS

***Background:***

Starting in the 2003–04 school year, states and school districts must develop and distribute annual report cards to parents and the public. The reports must include achievement data from the state assessments in math and reading, and these data must show results according to race/ethnicity, disability, gender, and socioeconomic status. Report cards for high schools must include graduation rates and states will choose another required indicator of progress for elementary schools. The reports must also include information about teacher qualifications, both as a total and as a comparison of teachers in high-poverty and low-poverty schools. State and local report cards will also list the number and percentage of schools identified for school improvement and allow for comparisons of achievement within a district and the state. School report cards must indicate how their achievement compares to other schools in the district and the state.

***Questions to ask at the state level:***

- Does your state currently use report cards or a similar means to disseminate information about student achievement and their progress in meeting state goals?
- If not, how will your state meet the report card requirements?
- Does your state's reporting mechanism provide information and explanatory information in a language parents can easily understand?
- Will the state report card provide data about factors other than test results, as required by the law? Such factors could include the level of resources schools receive or technical assistance provided, and would ensure that fair evaluations are made.

***Questions to ask at the school district level:***

- How does the district provide parents an opportunity to comment on what information should be provided in local report cards, above what is required?

- Will the school report card provide data about factors other than test results, such as class size, teacher quality, and the level of parent involvement, so that comparisons are fair?

***Questions to ask at the local school level:***

- Do the principal, teachers, and parents at the local school level have any say in what information is included in the school report cards?
- Is the information presented in a context and language that all parents in the school can understand?

***For more information:***

- National PTA, Components of an Effective School: www.pta.org/cfplus/legis/issues/effschl.htm

## SUPPLEMENTAL SERVICES

***Background:***

The law establishes consequences for states and schools that do not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) towards raising the academic achievement of all students, as measured by state assessments.

One such consequence requires Title I schools that fail to make AYP for three consecutive years to provide "supplemental educational services," which means tutoring or other academic services provided in addition to instruction offered during the school day. Title I funds will pay for these services, which can be provided by public, private, nonprofit or for-profit entities, including religious institutions.

***Questions to ask at the state level:***

- How are parents involved in developing criteria for determining what providers will be approved by the state to receive federal funding? What are those criteria?
- Has the state developed standards for the quality and effectiveness of services?
- Are parents substantively involved in developing a grievance procedure for parents dissatisfied with the services their child receives? What is that process?
- Does the state intend to monitor civil rights compliance and report to the public?

***Questions to ask at the school district level:***

- How does the district help parents whose children receive supplemental services develop achievement goals aligned to their child's progress and learning needs?
- How does the district maintain the confidentiality of student records?
- How will the district monitor the effectiveness of supplemental service providers in improving student achievement, observing civil rights laws, and ensuring student safety?

***Questions to ask at the local school level:***

- How will the school notify parents of the availability of supplemental services?
- Does the school provide and promote school-based supplemental education services?
- How will the school ensure that providers work with parents to develop education plans for each child, and communicate with parents regarding their child's progress?
- How will the school maintain the confidentiality of student records?

***For more information:***

- National PTA's Comments in Negotiated Rulemaking for Title I: www.pta.org/cfplus/legis/issues/isstitleone.htm

## FLEXIBILITY

***Background:***

States and districts may transfer up to 50 percent of funds received for specific programs, either among those programs or into Title I. As many as seven states, and as many as 10 districts within each state, may be authorized to consolidate funds for several specified programs, including Title I, and use these funds for any purpose permitted under ESEA. As many as 80 additional school districts may also be authorized to consolidate funds under several federal education programs. School districts must consult and involve parents in the development of their proposed flexibility plan, and publish annual reports describing how the consolidation improves student achievement.

Because both transferability and the flexibility demonstration projects have state and district components, the same questions may be asked at both levels of implementation.

***Questions to ask at the state and local levels on transferability:***

- How will a proposed transfer help accomplish the state or district's education goals?
- How will parents be involved in developing transfer plans?
- How will the effectiveness of programs whose funding is diverted be maintained?
- How will the proposed transfer of funds maintain targeting to students most at risk?

***Questions to ask at the state and local levels on flexibility demonstration projects:***

- How will parents be involved in the development of any contemplated proposal?
- How does the proposed consolidation help meet the purposes of the consolidated programs? For example, how will consolidation enhance parent involvement?
- How will the effectiveness of the flexibility project be evaluated and reported?
- How does the proposed consolidation improve accountability?

***Questions to ask at the local school level:***

- All programs are inadequately funded. How does flexibility resolve this problem?
- How would transferring or consolidating funds affect the delivery of programs and services?
- How does the school currently document program effectiveness?
- How would transferring or consolidating federal funds affect administrative burdens?

***For more information:***

- National PTA's Comments in Negotiated Rulemaking for Title I: www.pta.org/cfplus/legis/issues/isstitleone.htm

## TEACHER QUALITY

***Background:***

The ESEA law places strong emphasis on teacher quality in promoting improved student achievement and requires that all public school teachers be "highly qualified" by the end of the 2005–06 school year, as defined in the law. Beginning in 2002, all teachers hired with Title I funds must meet this definition, which states that teachers must be fully licensed or certified by the state, and have at least a bachelor's degree. In addition, new elementary school teachers must pass a state test demonstrating their subject knowledge and teaching skills in elementary education. New secondary school teachers must demonstrate competency in the subject areas taught, or have their major in the subject they teach. Current teachers must also meet these criteria or demonstrate competency using a new state evaluation. Charter school teachers do not have to be licensed or certified, if allowed by their state laws, but they still must demonstrate competency. States will have to report annually on their progress toward

meeting these goals, and on the qualifications of their teachers and the percent of classes in the state not taught by highly qualified teachers.

***Questions to ask at the state level:***

- What percentage of teachers in your state would meet the "highly qualified" definition?
- What is the state doing to ensure that all new teachers hired with Title I dollars, as well as non-Title I teachers, are highly qualified?
- Is your state currently experiencing a teacher shortage? How will your state comply with the teacher quality provisions of the law?

***Questions to ask at the school district level:***

- Do higher income schools in the district have more highly qualified teachers than lower income schools?
- Is there a school district plan to help teachers who are not highly qualified become so, and to recruit more highly qualified teachers into the school district?
- Do the professional development opportunities provided to your teachers include instruction on how to work effectively with parents?

***Questions to ask at the local school level:***

- What are the qualifications of teachers at your school?
- How many teachers in your schools would not meet the definition of highly qualified?
- How many teachers in your school are not teaching in their field?

***For more information:***

- The National Council for the Advancement of Teacher Accreditation: www.ncate.org/

## PARENTS WANT TO KNOW…

If you are new to legislation and advocacy, the terminology may be unfamiliar. Here are answers to frequently asked questions.

**What is a Title I school?** Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) targets federal funds to high-poverty communities to provide compensatory educational services to low-achieving students. Title I schools can use federal funds in a number of ways—developing assessments, providing professional development opportunities, offering support services, improving curriculum, etc. - to ensure that low-achieving children are able to meet the same high academic standards all children are expected to meet. Title I funds are distributed by a poverty-based formula to approximately 90 percent of school districts in the nation. Unfortunately, however, funding for Title I is only sufficient to fully serve about one-third of all eligible children.

**How do I know if my children attend a Title I school?** The principal should know if your school receives Title I funds. Some schools, with high overall concentrations of poverty, operate "school-wide programs," which means they use their federal funds to improve the overall program at the entire school. Other schools target their federal funds to the children most at risk of educational failure and provide individual services to help them achieve.

**If the law does not require that states or school districts evaluate a school's level of parent involvement in their report cards, how can parents change this?** Parents need to inform local and state school officials about the benefits of parent involvement. Research shows that parent involvement has positive, long-term effects on children's academic achievement, and it is to the school's advantage to work with parents to maximize this impact. Report cards that include data on the level of parent involvement would be helpful to parents in evaluating their children's school.

**Is parent involvement defined in the law?** For the first time, ESEA defines the term parent involvement. Based on PTA's *National Standards for Parent and Family Involvement*, the definition of parent involvement is the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities. This includes ensuring that parents play an integral role in assisting their child's learning, that parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their children's education at schools, and that parents are full partners in their children's education included, as appropriate, in the decision-making and on advisory committees.

**What is "Adequate Yearly Progress"?** "Adequate Yearly Progress," or AYP, is a performance goal each state is required to set for all students to reach 100 percent proficiency on the state's academic assessments within the next 12 years. The initial goal for school year 2002–03 must be linked to the performance of the current lowest-achieving group of students or schools in the state. Overall, all public schools must meet a state's annual performance goals, *and* each subgroup of students - including economically disadvantaged students, students from major racial and ethnic minority groups, students with disabilities, and limited-English proficient students - must meet the annual goals.

**What does "Disaggregation of Data" mean?** States, school districts, and schools are required to disaggregate - or separate - student achievement data according to different groups of students. In ESEA, student data must be disaggregated by gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, English proficiency, and disability. This is required in part to prevent a situation in which high achievement by some students masks low achievement by others. Disaggregation ensures that achievement of students in each category is evaluated separately so problems can be identified and addressed.

**If my child's school is required to offer public school choice, does that mean I can enroll my child in any public school?** Not necessarily. School districts must provide all students in schools that have failed to make AYP for two consecutive years the option to transfer to another public school within the district, provided that school has not also been identified as being in need of improvement. If all schools within a district are in "school improvement" status, then the district must, "to the extent practicable," establish an agreement with neighboring districts. However, the law does not state that schools must accept all public school choice transfers, particularly in cases of limited capacity, or in schools with competitive admission criteria, such as magnets or schools for the performing arts. The U.S. Department of Education may issue guidance on this issue.

**What are supplemental services?** The term "supplemental services" as used in the law, means educational instruction or tutoring provided outside of the regular school day. If schools fail to make AYP for three years, schools must offer supplemental educational services. States will approve providers, which may be the schools themselves, other non-profit entities, for-profit companies such as Sylvan, and religious entities. Providers must demonstrate effectiveness, align their content with the school district's standards and curriculum, and comply with state, local, and federal health, safety, and civil rights laws. Beginning in 2002, school districts must contract with providers, develop individual plans with parents outlining specific achievement goals for the students, and describe how parents and teachers will be kept informed of the students' progress. Priority for supplemental service funds is given to low-achieving students.

# Parent Involvement Schools of Excellence

## What Is the Parent Involvement Schools of Excellence Program?

It is a comprehensive three-step program that provides schools with the tools they need to achieve excellence in parent/family involvement.

A team – including a teacher, administrator, parent, student, and community member – studies, evaluates, and, where needed, works on developing or improving all aspects of the school's parent/family involvement program.

Working with our partners, the certification process was developed and tested in seven pilot schools across the country. Schools from New Hampshire to Alaska, from Indiana to Texas completed the pilot program. It is now available to all schools across the country.

## Why Has National PTA Created a Certification Program for Schools?

Every child deserves to attend a school of excellence. This program was designed to assist every school in the nation to evaluate and increase parent/family involvement. National PTA knows that schools that work well with families have improved teacher morale, more support form families, and better reputations in the community.

National PTA recognizes the challenges schools face in reaching out to and engaging all families in their children's education. This program gives all schools the opportunity to be identified and showcased for implementing the highest standards of parent/family involvement programs by:

- Reaching out and including more parents and families
- Improving school support from families and communities
- Meeting new state standards where applicable, and
- Recognizing best practices and excellence in parent/family involvement.

## Who Are National PTA's Partners?

- American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
- National Association of Elementary School Principals
- National Association of Secondary School Principals
- National Education Association
- National School Public Relations Association

## For More Information on the Parent Involvement Schools of Excellence Program

Visit National PTA's website at http://www.pta.org/parentinvolvemetn/certification or call (800) 307-4782 for more information.

## Cooperating with Other Organizations

The PTA often acts jointly with other organizations to achieve common goals. Such cooperative efforts are frequently in response to an invitation from another group, or they may be initiated by the PTA. Cooperation may take many forms. It may be simply giving PTA members information about the aims, work, and services of another organization or a public agency. Or cooperation may involve communicating to the public the policies and work of public boards and commissions. A PTA might correlate its work on safety or health with that of a community safety council or health council to avoid duplication of effort and to gain the strength of a united endeavor.

Cooperative relationships are maintained with official agencies, professional organizations, youth-serving groups, and at the local level, community or coordinating councils.

Some of the official agencies with which the PTA cooperates are public, tax-supported government organizations established to serve the people, such as departments of health and education, public welfare commissions, children's courts, recreation commissions, police and probation departments, and federal agencies such as the U.S. Department of Education.

The work of these agencies is related to the well-being of children and families, and the PTA relies on them for information and service. The PTA increases public understanding of their functions and services, and encourages the public to provide adequate budgets for them. It is appropriate for the PTA to study, question, and evaluate the services rendered by these agencies and recommend improvements. It seeks neither to direct their administrative activities nor to control their policies.

PTAs may also cooperate with professional organizations in education, health, social welfare, and related fields to undertake joint studies, surveys, or projects. These organizations can provide the PTA with specialized information based on research and can help with and advise on carrying out the PTA's work for children's well being. The PTA can transmit information about children and their needs and problems from these organizations to the public.

The PTA considers the work done by many youth-serving organizations and groups to be of tremendous value and frequently cooperates with them. PTAs may work with and aid any group under the following guidelines:

- The PTA assumes no obligation (expressed or otherwise), responsibility, or liability for the competence, actions, or omissions of any person or persons who may have been or may become active as a leader, participant, or otherwise in any organization or group sponsored by the PTA.
- No PTA representative may commit the PTA to join any other group or agree to abide by any other group's bylaws or policies.
- At the community level, PTA cooperation is easier when there is an overall organization such as a coalition or council. Such groups enable agencies and organizations to work together on community problems. PTA should retain its own identity and should not be committed to courses of action outside its own field of operation.
- When a PTA participates, it makes sure that the rules of procedure or bylaws of that organization do not conflict with its own bylaws and the bylaws of the state and National PTAs. PTAs should withdraw from participation in the event of such conflicts.

These guidelines should not be interpreted as precluding a member of PTA from belonging to any other organization, regardless of whether or not that organization's bylaws or policies conflict with those of the PTA. However, PTA members should exercise caution to avoid leaving the impression that they are acting as representatives of the PTA.

## Limits of Cooperation

Cooperation does not include participating in fund-raising or membership enrollment activities for other organizations, contributing funds to finance the work of another organization (although a PTA may bear its share of the costs of a cooperative project), or agreeing to abide by another group's by-laws, policies, or regulations. If cooperation requires the signing of a contractual agreement, the National PTA recommends seeking legal advice to determine the extent of liability.

The PTA needs to take an active role in directing any cooperative undertaking to ensure that these cooperative goals and procedures remain consistent with the objects, policies, and procedures of the PTA.

Projects are required to be submitted for approval to the voting body of the PTA. If funds are required for the project, the PTA may bear its share of the necessary expenses. It should not make any financial commitment until the expenditure of a definite amount is approved by its executive committee and authorized by the proper voting body.

A PTA contemplating a cooperative relationship should ask two questions:

- Will the proposed cooperation promote one or more of the National PTA Purposes?
- Will it conform to basic policies as stated in the PTA's bylaws?

If it fulfills both requirements, the cooperation may then be considered with respect to its feasibility, appropriateness at the time, and so on.

## Georgia PTA Cooperating Organizations

**Adoptive and Foster Parent Association of Georgia**
12216 Apache Ave
Savannah, GA 31419

**American Cancer Society, Georgia Division**
1825 Barrett Lakes Blvd Ste. 280
Kennesaw, GA 30144
404-816-4994
www.cancer.org

**American Heart Association, Georgia Affiliate**
1101 Northchase Parkway #1
Marietta, GA 30067
678-385-2075
www.amhrt.org

**American Lung Association**
61 Broadway, 6th Floor
New York, NY 10006
212-315-8700
www.lungusa.org

**American Red Cross, Atlanta Chapter**
1955 Monroe Drive NE
Atlanta, GA 30324
404-876-3302
www.redcross.org

**Association of Future Farmers of America**
P.O. Box 68960, 6060 FFA Drive
Indianapolis, IN 46268
317-802-6060
www.ffa.org

**Campfire Boys and Girls of Georgia**
100 Edgewood Ave NE
Atlanta, GA
30303
404-527-7125
http://www.unitedwayatl.org/211_Database/helpbook/UWMA0340AF.html

**Distributive Education Clubs of America**
1908 Association Drive
Reston, VA 20191
703-860-5000
www.deca.org

**Diversified Cooperative Training**
http://www.gapsc.com/TeacherCertification/Documents/RULES/505-2-.103.asp

**Future Business Leaders of America**
1912 Association Drive
Reston, VA 20191
1-800-325-2946
www.fbla-pbl.org

**Georgia Alcohol Policy Partnership**
6045 Atlantic Blvd
Norcross, GA 30071
770-239-7442
http://www.macad.org/gapp/

**Georgia Alliance for the Mentally Ill**
3050 Presidential Drive Ste. 202
Atlanta, GA 30340
770-234-0855
www.namiga.nami.org/namiga/

**Georgia Association of Nursing Students**
http://www.geocities.com/CollegePark/Pool/2886/GANSinfo.html

**Georgia Association for Retarded Citizens**
1851 Ram Runway Ste. 102
College Park, GA 30337
404-761-2745

**Georgia Association for the Prevention of Blindness**
455 East Paces Ferry Road Ste. 222
Atlanta, GA 30305
404-266-0071

**Georgia Association of Educators**
100 Crescent Center Pkwy., Suite 500
Tucker, GA 30084
678-837-1100
www.gae.org

**Georgia Association of School Psychologists**
www.gaspnet.org

**Georgia Bar Association**
50 Hurt Plaza SE
Atlanta, GA 30303
404-315-0024
www.gabar.org

**Georgia Chamber of Commerce**
235 Peachtree Street, NE Ste. 900
Atlanta, GA 30303
404-223-2264
www.gachamber.org

**Georgia Child Care Council**
50 Executive Park South
Atlanta, GA 30329
404-479-4233
www.state.ga.us/gccc/

**Georgia Clean and Beautiful**
404-679-4910
www.keepgeorgiabeautiful.org

**Georgia Council on Child Abuse**
1720 Peachtree St. NW
Atlanta, GA 30309
404-870-6565

**Georgia Dental Association**
7000 Peachtree Dunwoody Rd NE Ste. 200 Bldg 17
Atlanta, GA 30328
404-636-7553
www.gadental.org

**Georgia Dept. of Education**
205 Butler St. SE
Atlanta, GA 30334
404-656-2598
www.gadoe.org

**Georgia Dept. of Family and Children's Services**
230 Peachtree Street NW Ste. 400
Atlanta, GA 30303
404-756-4900

**Georgia Dept. of Human Resources**
2 Peachtree Street NW Ste. 29-213
Atlanta, GA 30303
404-656-6750
http://www2.state.ga.us/Departments/DHR/

**Georgia Dept. of Public Health**
Two Peachtree Street, NW
Atlanta, GA 30303
404-657-2700
http://www.ph.dhr.state.ga.us/

**Georgia Easter Seal Society**
3035 N Druid Hills Rd
Atlanta, GA 30329
404-633-9609
www.easter-seals.org

**Georgia Extension Service**
678 South Cobb Drive Ste. 200
Marietta, GA 30060
770-528-4070
http://www.griffin.peachnet.edu/ga/cobb/General.htm

**Georgia Family Connection**
235 Peachtree Street, North Tower Suite 1600
Atlanta, GA 30303
404-527-7394
http://www.georgiafamilyconnection.org/

**Georgia Library Association**
P.O. Box 793
Rex, GA30273
http://wwwlib.gsu.edu/gla/

**Georgia Nurses Association**
3032 Briarcliff Road
Atlanta, GA 30329
404-325-5536
www.georgianurses.org

**Georgia Nutrition Advisory Council**
2372 Main Street
Tucker, GA 30084

**Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education**
235 Peachtree Street Ste. 900
Atlanta, GA 30303
404-223-2280
www.gpee.org

**Georgia Press Association**
3066 Mercer University Drive Ste. 200
Atlanta, GA 30341
770-454-6776
www.gapress.org

**Georgia Rehabilitation Association**
125 Athens West Parkway
Athens, GA 30606
706-354-3900
www.georgiarehab.com

**Georgia Safety Council**
3300 NE Expressway, Ste. 5A
Atlanta, GA 30351
770-457-5100
www.nsc.org

**Georgia School Boards Association**
5120 Sugarloaf Pkwy.
Lawrenceville, GA 30043
770-962-2985
www.gsba.com

**Georgia School Superintendents Association**
MSC6A1010 33 Gilmore Street SE Unit 6
Atlanta, GA 30303
404-651-0940
www.gssanet.org

**Georgians for Children**
300 W. Wieuca Road NW Ste. 216
Atlanta, GA 30342
404-843-0017
www.georgians.com

**Georgia Association of Educational Leaders**
5634 Atlanta Hwy Ste. 300
Flowery Branch, GA 30542
770-967-2050
www.gael.org

**Girl Scouts of America**
420 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10018
1-800-478-7248
www.girlscouts.org

**Governor's Office of Highway Safety**
One Park Tower 34 Peachtree St. Ste. 1600
Atlanta, GA 30303
404-656-6996
www.gohs.state.ga.us

**League of Women Voters of Georgia**
P.O. Box 29751
Atlanta, GA
678-547-0755
www.lwvga.org

**Learning Disabilities Association of Georgia**
130 West Wieuca Road Ste. 202
Atlanta, GA 30342
404-303-7774
www.ldag.org

**March of Dimes**
1776 Peachtree Street Ste. 100
Atlanta, GA 30309
404-350-9800
www.marchofdimesga.org

**Medical Association of Georgia**
1330 W Peachtree St NW Ste. 500
Atlanta, GA 30309
404-876-7535
www.mag.org

**Medical College of Georgia Children's Medical Center**
1120 15th Street
Augusta, GA 30912
706-721-0211
www.cmc.mcg.edu

**Mental Health Association of Georgia**
1720 Central Avenue
Augusta, GA 30904
706-736-4339
www.nmhag.org

**Metropolitan Atlanta Council on Alcohol and Drugs**
6045 Atlantic Blvd
Norcross, GA 30071
770-239-7442
www.macad.org

**Mothers Against Drunk Driving**
511 E John Carpenter Freeway Ste. 700
Irving, TX 75062
1-800-438-6233
www.maad.org/home

**National Association of Student Councils**
1904 Association Drive
Reston, VA 20191
703-860-0200
www.nasc.us

**National Highway Traffic Safety Administration**
61 Forsyth Street SW
Atlanta, GA 30303
404-562-3739
http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/

**National Parents Day Coalition**
208 North Patrick Street
Alexandria, VA 22314
703-548-4904
www.parentsday.com

**National Park Service**
100 Alabama Street SW 1924 Bldg
Atlanta, GA 30303
404-562-3100
www.nps.gov

**National Recreation and Parks Safety**
22377 Belmont Ridge Road
Ashburn, VA 20148
703-858-0784
www.nrpa.org

**PRIDE**
166 St. Charles Street
Bowling Green, KY 42101
1-800-279-6361
www.pridesurveys.com

**Professional Association of Georgia Educators**
P.O. Box 942270
Atlanta, GA 31141
770-216-8555
www.pageinc.org

**Safe Kids of Georgia**
1505 Clifton Road NE
Atlanta, GA 30322
404-929-8686
http://www.choa.org/safety/safekids.shtml

**Salvation Army**
615 Slaters Lane P.O. Box 269
Alexandria, VA 22313
www.salvationarmyusa.org

**Sierra Club**
1447 Peachtree Street NE Ste. 305
Atlanta, GA 30309
404-607-1262
http://georgia.sierraclub.org

**United Way of Georgia**
100 Edgewood Ave NE
Atlanta, GA 30303
404-614-1000
www.unitedwayatl.org

**University System of Georgia**
270 Washington Street SW
Atlanta, GA 30334
www.usg.edu

**USDA: Food - Nutrition Service**
61 Forsyth Street SW Rm. 8T25
Atlanta, GA 30303
404-562-7060
www.fns.usda.gov

**YMCA of Georgia**
P.O. Box 2200
Cartersville, GA 30120
770-382-9622
www.yclub.org

## On-Line Resources

With endless resources and information, the internet expands opportunities for families around the globe. Listed below are PTA websites and other legislative websites for you to use. Other important websites can also be visited from the National PTA website.

**PTA Websites**
- Georgia PTA Website
  www.georgiapta.org
- National PTA Website
  www.pta.org

**Legislative Websites**
- GA Net Legislative Services
  www.ganet.org/services/leg
- Governor Sonny Perdue
  www.ganet.org/gov
- Georgia House and Senate
  www.state.ga.us/legis/house/index.htm
- GA School Superintendents' Association
  www.com/hpi/gssa/legrpt.html
- GA Secretary of State
  www.sos.state.ga.us
- GA School Board's Association
  www.com/gsba

# National PTA Writes the Book on How to Build Strong School-Community Partnerships

A comprehensive, practical new resource is now available to bring parents, educators, communities, and schools together. Authored by a leading authority on parent involvement, the National PTA, *Building Successful Partnerships: A Guide for Developing Parent and Family Involvement Programs* incorporates the National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs and other field-tested strategies for improving parent involvement through:

- Communicating – Communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful.
- Parenting – Parenting skills are promoted and supported.
- Student learning – Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.
- Volunteering – Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought.
- School decision making and advocacy – Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families.
- Collaborating with the community – Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families, and student learning.

Created for parents, administrators, teachers, parent involvement professionals, Title I coordinators, and leaders of PTAs and other parent groups, this groundbreaking new resource has been designed to facilitate meaningful discussion and provide the foundation for developing a quality parent involvement program that works.

The softcover book, Building Successful Partnerships, is available for $18.95 from the publisher, National Educational Service (Item #NPTA-BKF00095). For more information or to place an order, call the (800) 733-6786, email sales@nesonline.com, or visit www.nesonline.com.

***"Certainly this is the most comprehensive guide I have seen on this critical subject."***
- Harold P. Seamon, Deputy Executive Director
*National School Boards Association*