



The Many Faces *of* Parent Involvement

MAKING PARENT INVOLVEMENT WORK FOR YOUR SCHOOL



LAWRENCE FAMILY DEVELOPMENT CHARTER SCHOOL

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EDITED BY

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LAWRENCE FAMILY DEVELOPMENT CHARTER SCHOOL

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A Word From Our Founder

The role of parents throughout history has been that of caregivers and educators of their children, modeling by language and example the lessons and legends by which culture and technology are transferred to the next generation. As the first teachers of their children, parents accept responsibility for the successful development of the child and the transmission of the values of their culture. The recognition and validation of this role by society and particularly by schools allows a child's education and development to progress and expand as he or she enters the institutions of organized learning.



Most citizens assume that as a society (and as individuals) we validate and value the importance of parental involvement as a key to children's success and academic achievement. In fact, and in practice, the parent's role as educator is often ignored or devalued as a result of day care, the influence of technology, the schedules of lives, and the barriers created by pervasive poverty. At Lawrence Family Development Charter School we believe that

Strong families, working in partnership with the school as advocates for academic achievement, will create an environment where every child has the opportunity to acquire the foundation skills and habits of mind that foster life-long learning, citizenship participation and personal fulfillment.

This Mission Statement was crafted a decade ago in response to the call for charter school models of education reform. It continues to serve as the vision for our school and our statement of purpose in gathering educators, parents and community leaders to consider how to design and implement effective strategies which foster and value parents as true partners in the education of their children.

As educators, we have the responsibility, opportunity and privilege to see beyond the barriers in order to embrace parental involvement and create authentic and effective parent partnerships that lead to increased academic achievement. It is to this goal that we have dedicated our school, our conference and this manual.

We invite you to participate not only in the workshops and discussions of today, but to help us build and expand a website of effective practices to take the ideas and ideals beyond the classrooms and communities of charter schools to include educators and families everywhere. Our sincere gratitude goes to the educators and families who have shared our vision this past decade and to all who join us today to improve opportunities for learning for students everywhere.

Sincerely yours,

Patricia Karl
 Director/Superintendent
 October 1, 2003

Introduction

A Personal Note from the Project Coordinator

Our modern world is a wonderful and sometimes frightening place. It is not the same as the world that existed 50 years ago or even 30 years ago when many of today's parents were growing up. The series of events that shocked the generation of the 60's, such as assassinations, an unpopular war and the Watergate crisis, have been followed by changes that have been more subtle but no less earth-shaking. Many of these changes have been brought about by technology which grows at an ever-faster pace and which has turned the relationship between parents and children on its head. Some readers will have thought about what it means to have all the information in the world at your fingertips, will have wondered what to do with it and will have marveled at how easily their children learn and understand the minds of machines.

Along with all of these gifts has come a pace of life that tries to keep up with those machines. We have instant food, instant money, instant information, and instant contact. We are annoyed when we get an answering machine at a doctor's office and yet, of course, we use them ourselves. Parents work, often very hard, often at several jobs. Parents and children both face the danger of being over-stressed and over-scheduled with pressure to succeed. And amidst all of this, parents are looking for assistance in how to cope. Books and magazine articles are written about how to manage the flow of information and media into our homes, about how to speak with children about tragedies that happen in far away places and about creating peaceful spaces where children can play and grow—and more.

With each year, we become privy to more information and more methods of gaining it (first there were cell phones, now there are cell phones with cameras!), but do we know what to do with it all? We have come to know more about the underside of the world—people and events that are far away as well as those right in our own backyards—than we ever knew before. We are full of information about how things *really* work, what famous and powerful people are *really* like and how people can be hurt most by those they trusted most. It has shattered our naiveté and cut through decades, or in some cases centuries, of denial. It has made us witnesses to crimes and wars and special moments truly as a global village. And it has shaken the structure of the relationships between adults and children in a fundamental way. When the history is written of the latter part of the 20th century someone will undoubtedly point out how many movies portrayed stupid, self-centered, materialistic adults being saved from their own narcissism by wise children.

But, it is not the Global Village that is going to raise our children.

Even the most educated parents cannot always keep up with what their children are learning at school, with the technological advances children absorb so easily and with the influences that come in from the outside world. And education is not always so easy to come by. Some parents, who entered the United States as refugees, had to forego education in their home countries in order to survive. Some have been traumatized by war, torture, starvation and the rigors of immigration. Some do not wish to give up their traditional cultural practices to become integrated

into American culture even as they want their children to benefit from it. Even without a level of trauma, parents are under tremendous pressure to make ends meet, to provide health care and to be alert to unseen threats and they can feel very threatened and judged by authorities.

Particularly for immigrant families, schools can be training grounds for assimilation. Whether in bilingual, dual language or total immersion classrooms, children quickly pick up the language of the culture and sometimes are the translators for the family, handling things like doctor's appointments and explaining what an "IEP" is to their parent. Not that this is new. Many, if not most, American families started out this way. But now that children seem to know more than their parents about so many things, parents can feel out of the loop, and the added challenge of immigration and cultural clash can make them feel even more disenfranchised

Kids are still kids. Children need a foundation to be planted in and to grow out of. They need to know where they stand and how much they can trust it. Only by knowing that someone will bring them back from the edge can children feel safe enough to test themselves by seeing how far they can go. The wisdom of Eric Erickson's stages of development (shown below) and the concomitant Ages and Tasks associated with them are no less accurate today than they were in Erickson's generation or in the generation of today's parents.

Trust vs. Mistrust
Autonomy vs. Shame & Doubt
Initiation vs. Guilt
Industry vs. Inferiority
Identity vs. Role Confusion
Intimacy vs. Isolation
Generativity vs. Stagnation
Ego Integrity vs. Despair

The first challenge, Trust vs. Mistrust, is the foundation of survival and adjustment.

Small children who do not attach and do not have such a foundation grow up depending primarily on themselves. They continue to test but it takes a lot for them to come to ever really trust the world around them and there can be tremendous upheaval along the way. In child development there is a whole new area of scholarship on Attachment Disorders that has evolved out of this phenomenon.

In 2003, interest in parent involvement in schools has increased because it has come to be required of school systems. There are Federal regulations within Title 1 and now the new ESEA, the No Child Left Behind Act, that insist on outreach and opportunities for parents in order to receive certain substantial kinds of funding. This is good because just as parents may not always think they have the time to devote to school events, so school personnel sometimes think they do not have the time to contact parents. That Federal regulations must mandate these relationships seems to underline how far the estrangement has come in 50 years. In this book we will not focus merely on how to comply with regulations. We hope to show how parent involvement efforts are important for child development, how they support learning and how to reach out to families who may be elusive.

We hope you will emerge working on parent involvement because you believe in it, as we do.

Carla J. Fink, Project Coordinator

Carla Fink is a clinical social worker with decades of experience addressing problems with children, adolescents and their families. Her recent work has focused on working with families by identifying and supporting strengths in individuals, families and their cultures and on bringing communities together to share in the joys and challenges of this work. She can be reached at cfink.lfdcs@verizon.net

Executive Summary

Charter Schools, created as a mechanism for innovation in public education, are often seen as little laboratories for innovative practices based on vision and demanding accountability. As such, once given the privilege of operating, charter schools are expected to give back what they have learned to the education community and the state that funds them. The information presented in this document is the result of a two year project funded by the Massachusetts Department of Education Charter School Office on best practices in parent involvement by the Lawrence Family Development Charter School, whose mission involves embedding education in strong families and strong communities.

In Phase I of the project a survey was constructed and mailed to 2,300 parents and school personnel from charter schools throughout the state soliciting their opinions on which practices were most valuable. The survey questions were categorized by the types of parent involvement identified by the National Network of Partnership Schools: Parenting, Communicating, Volunteering, Learning at Home, Decision-Making and Collaborating with the Community (see Reference 2). A detailed report on how the survey was constructed and analyzed, along with a copy of the actual survey and results is contained in this manual.

Phase II of the project culminated in an all-day conference held on October 1, 2003, entitled “The Many Faces of Parent Involvement: Making Parent Involvement Work for **Your** School” at which parent involvement specialists and parent partners from six charter schools presented some of their most ground-breaking work. The conference also highlighted the innovative community-based work and academic research that support efforts to involve parents in school life. The section entitled “Conference and Manual” contains detailed descriptions of the work of our charter school partners, along with documents generously provided by presenters that may be used by readers as is or as templates for developing their own materials. The last part of this section contains a mini-manual from the Project for School Innovation that walks users through the steps necessary to create an Action Plan that is central to any change initiative. Contact information is provided for all of these presenters for anyone seeking further information or resources.

Although there are by definition differences between overall perceptions of best practices as revealed in the survey and actual successful work done by individual schools in specific communities, certain common themes emerged from this work. These themes should be valuable to anyone wishing to develop a parent involvement program while maximizing limited resources (which probably includes anyone who might be reading this manual at any school in the country.) The following conclusions stand out:

- ❖ Good communication is the most important element in keeping parents involved with school. This includes maintaining a website, speaking the parents’ language, and identifying one point person for parent involvement who has excellent skills, is known to all and is easily accessible as a bridge between school and home.

- ❖ Connecting with parents on an individual basis, learning their strengths and skills, appreciating their cultures and showing that school personnel understand their child eases the way for communication with parents.
- ❖ Individualized connection also paves the way for parents to volunteer at the school.
- ❖ Contacting parents to report on the good things that students do rather than only about problems sets a good precedent.
- ❖ Written policies and contracts, especially when used early in an enrollment process, help parents to understand the expectations of the school and help school personnel to hold parents accountable for participation. These can be customized and used in myriad ways that facilitate understanding. Several examples are included here.
- ❖ Parental decision-making at school is a complex issue. In general, parents seem to appreciate it when they are asked for input into school policies or practices but do not want to take on operational aspects of running the school. There are notable exceptions, one of which is presented in this manual.
- ❖ Since the problem of time, for both parents and school personnel, is the most significant obstacle to parent involvement, schools must think of creative ways to keep parents involved while appreciating today's demands.
- ❖ Parents will seek help in learning how to help their children with school and homework, but not necessarily with how to parent them. Family learning experiences are fun for all.

The most important message, however, that we hope readers will take with them is simple: *KNOW YOUR COMMUNITY*. This manual provides ideas and guidelines; the rest is up to you.

About Our School

ABOUT OUR SCHOOL

The Lawrence Family Development Charter School (LFDCS) educates the children of Hispanic newcomers and immigrants and provides them and their families with better opportunities for the future. LFDCS was founded in 1995 by a coalition of Hispanic parents and community leaders who wanted a school that would be responsive to the academic, language, cultural, and developmental needs of their children. The founders of the Lawrence Family Development Charter School wanted to provide a choice for parents where none existed before.

So reads the Statement of Origin for Lawrence Family Development Charter School. But even a quick look at the Mission Statement illustrates the primacy of families in the work of educating children.

Strong families, working in partnership with the school as advocates for academic achievement, will create an environment where every child has the opportunity to acquire the foundation skills and habits of mind that foster life-long learning, citizenship participation, and personal fulfillment.

HISTORY OF OUR SCHOOL

The Lawrence Family Development Charter School (LFDCS) was founded in 1995 by a coalition of Hispanic parents and community leaders who wanted a school that would be responsive to the academic, language, cultural, and developmental needs of their children. The founders wanted to provide an alternative that supported language and cultural values important to families in the community. They dedicated themselves and the

school to educating the children of immigrants and other new arrivals to the City of Lawrence and preparing them and their families to move forward with skills needed for success in the 21st Century.

Since its founding LFDCS has made a wide variety of community resources (health services, ESL classes, computer training, etc.) available, either on site or through referral, to students, parents, and other adults in the City of Lawrence. The school opened in 1995 with 178 students enrolled in Kindergarten through third grade. It has grown since then to a Kindergarten through eighth grade institution with an enrollment of 500 students. After successfully completing our first five years of operation and the charter renewal application process, we received a five-year charter renewal from the Massachusetts Department of Education in May of 2000. We anticipate reaching our full enrollment goal of 540 students during the 2004-2005 school year.

In June of 2001, LFDCS graduated its first class of eighth graders, a group of 29 young people who had been with the school since it opened in 1995. In the 2002 graduating class, of the 29 students going on to high school, 45% were accepted at parochial and independent private high schools. LFDCS has created a Guidance Placement Program to help students and their families learn about and explore regional private institutions, help them prepare for SSATs, fill out applications, arrange field trips to visit schools and even offer financial assistance to help with application fees.

“Our goal is to make assistance available to all families, particularly immigrants and newcomers facing the poverty of economics, education and experience, which can accompany the transition into the community.”

LAWRENCE FAMILY DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION FUND, INC.

The Lawrence Family Development and Education Fund, Inc. (LFDEF), the sponsoring organization of our charter school, was established in 1992 to address issues important to families in the City of Lawrence. The organization's goals are focused on educating families as a means of strengthening the community. LFDEF was begun as a nonprofit entity to develop new projects that would carry out the mission and vision of the founders. LFDEF was also created to access and manage resources that would support the work of the Lawrence Youth Commission, which addresses issues such as education reform, minority leadership, awareness of and access to college and careers and which, through its community service programs, gives youths an opportunity to discover their skills and potential, and to see themselves as builders of their community. Moreover, LFDEF operates programs such as City C.O.R.E., one of the original AmeriCorps programs in Massachusetts, and YouthBuild, a national education and job-training program.

CORNERSTONES FOR SUCCESS

The cornerstones for success, established when our school was founded, have provided the vision that continues to drive the work of our charter school. As guiding principles and practices, they have been important rallying points for administrative and instructional staff, parents, and community leaders, attracting quality and like-minded professionals to our school who form a hard working team focused on providing a high-quality education for our students.

The Academic Program. Our program includes a dual language model with student learning in both Spanish and English. The goal is to enable students to attain advanced levels of functional proficiency in two languages and to promote understanding of and appreciation for the cultures represented by the languages studied. The primary objective is to teach students language and literacy skills that will allow them to function effectively in both their personal and professional lives. We feel the development of literacy will foster a love of learning to read, and then the competency of reading to learn.

Family Resources. Our goal is to make assistance available to all families, particularly immigrants and newcomers facing the poverty of economics, education and experience, which can accompany the transition into the community. We feel these services (such as providing after school programs, breakfast and lunch to all eligible children, complete health and dental care for those students who do not have health insurance, workshops and classes for parents) help provide parents and families the skills and resources to become advocates for their children and partners with the school.

Leadership. We believe there is a strong link between school success and effective and consistent leadership. As a result, our school has a Board of Trustees, composed of parents and community leaders; the board provides valuable oversight and focuses on creating and upholding policies that support our students and their families. We also have initiated a new administrative structure with a principal and heads of upper and lower schools, who manage daily operations and discipline.

“We believe that when parents are actively involved in their children’s education, students have a better chance of succeeding academically.”

Leadership from the ranks of the teaching staff is also highly evident, as teachers improve curriculum, serve as mentors to novice educators and work to attain National Board Certification.

Community Partnerships. Our goal is to work with many individuals and organizations in order to provide the resources necessary to enhance and enrich the lives of our students, both during the day and in our extended day and extended year programs. The quality and breadth of our community partnership program is unique. We work with an extensive array of community centers, local private schools, parent and community volunteers, and organizations providing on-site programs. Students benefit, for example, from weekly art instruction provided by artists at the Essex Arts Center, physical education classes provided by the swim and gym professionals at a local community center, and youth development programs offered through the local YWCA.

Parent Partners is our final cornerstone for success. We believe that when parents are actively involved in their children’s education, students have a better chance of succeeding academically. At LFDCS parents are required to be active participants in the education of their children. Parents serve on our Board of Trustees, participate in the School Linked Services Program, and they volunteer in the classroom and on field trips, or with a fundraising initiative. All parents sign a contract that places high expectations on their participation both at school and at home.

Further information about LFDCS, including School Performance and Academic Achievement assessments in all subject areas for all grades may be found in our Annual Reports or accessed on the Massachusetts Department of Education website at www.doe.mass.edu/charter/reports/2002/annual/0454.pdf.

About This Project

Why Charter Schools Can be Models for Parent Involvement

In the fall of 2001, LFDCS was awarded a Dissemination Grant from the Massachusetts Department of Education Charter School Office to research best practices of parental involvement employed by charter schools and to disseminate the information gathered to charter schools and traditional public schools throughout the state.

This book proudly presents the results of this two year process of research and dissemination in the hope that other schools, including charter schools, traditional public schools and independent schools of all kinds will find ways to improve their outcomes by making their own communities stronger.

Over and over again, in speaking with charter school leaders and parents about their involvement with their schools, one hears these words:

"We could not run the school without the parents"

and

"The school would not exist without us."

Parents and charter schools have a mutual, perhaps symbiotic, relationship. Because parents send their children to charter schools out of choice, they have expectations for the result. Because charter schools are often short on funding and resources, they usually cannot operate without resources from the community. Because one of the opportunities in charter schools is for innovation, a sense of excitement and commitment can develop around the school's practices, creating a valuable bond. Uniquely for public schools, in charter schools, parents can be

founders and Board members, roles that do not exist in traditional public schools. They may want a lot of input or they may want the school to educate their child and leave them alone, but the bottom line is the parents need the school and the school needs the parents.

Charter schools are also accountable in ways that traditional public schools are not. They are regularly evaluated by teams of monitors; they must be re-chartered every 5 years; and if enough students do not pass the state-mandated testing they may be forced to close. But, more importantly, if they are not offering a service that their community wants, they will not be there in much the same way that a local restaurant will not remain open if people do not come. Charter schools offer a service and families must buy it. Or, as the Charter School Overview on the Mass DOE website puts it

The purposes for establishing charter schools are: (1) to stimulate the development of innovative programs within public education; (2) to provide opportunities for innovative learning and assessments; (3) to provide parents and students with greater options in choosing schools within and outside their school districts; (4) to provide teachers with a vehicle for establishing schools with alternative, innovative methods of educational instruction and school structure and management; (5) to encourage performance-based educational programs; (6) to hold teachers and school administrators accountable for students' educational outcomes; and (7) to provide models for replication in other public schools . (MGL Ch 71 § 89(d))

“This book proudly presents the results of this two year process of research and dissemination in the hope that other schools, including charter schools, traditional public schools and independent schools of all kinds will find ways to improve their outcomes by making their own communities stronger.”

The board of education shall develop procedures and guidelines for revocation and renewal of a school's charter; provided, however, that a charter for a Horace Mann charter school shall not be renewed by the board without a vote of support from the school committee and local collective bargaining agent in the district where said charter school is located; provided that a commonwealth charter shall not be renewed unless the board of trustees of the charter school has documented in a manner approved by the board of education that said commonwealth charter school has provided models for replication and best practices to the commissioner and to other public schools in the district where the charter school is located. (MGL Ch 71 § 89 (II))

Given choices and the ability to choose, parents from all walks of life are becoming consumers of education. It seems that when there is no longer a good excuse for leaving all the decisions about your child's education to someone else, and when you hear about others who are exercising their right to choose, you are motivated to act, to investigate, and to get involved. Because Charter schools are viewed as forces for school reform and innovation, they are often characterized as little laboratories for best practices in various areas of education. One of their tasks, and one that is required when schools seek to renew their charters, is dissemination of the “best practices” they have put in place.

ABOUT THIS PROJECT SURVEY AND DISSEMINATION

The project was divided into two parts, the first year consisting of a **Survey** of Massachusetts Charter Schools including parents, teachers, administrators and other school personnel. The second year focused on **Dissemination**, preparation of material for this **Manual** and our **website** and the **conference** we hosted on October 1, 2003 in Worcester, Massachusetts. The remaining chapters of this Manual present what was learned from those connected with Charter Schools in the hope that this information can help all schools to develop family friendly programs that support families and ultimately the achievement of their students.

Lawrence Family Development Charter School wishes to thank the Massachusetts Department of Education and our partners and consultants for their invaluable assistance with this project, including:

Robert Apsler	Patricia Karl
Jacquelin Apsler	Pam Killilea
Deirdre Arthen	Rosa Payes
Lissette Aquino	Mat Pilotte
Lauren Bessen	Michael Rothman
Lara Foulke	Carmen Schumann
Ain Grooms	Felicia Smith
Peter Kamberelis	

About the Survey

The first phase of the project was the construction and administration of a survey of Massachusetts Charter Schools to identify parent involvement best practices employed in the schools. The survey asked the following questions:

TO WHAT EXTENT DO PARENTS WANT TO BE INVOLVED AT THEIR CHILDREN'S SCHOOLS?
IN WHAT WAYS DO THEY WISH TO BE INVOLVED?
WHAT ARE THE OBSTACLES THAT LIMIT PARENT INVOLVEMENT?
HOW DO PARENTS' VIEWS DIFFER FROM THOSE OF SCHOOL STAFF?

The following steps were taken to construct and conduct the survey:

- ❖ Review of the literature on parent involvement.
- ❖ Retained the services of an independent survey team, Apsler Research & Evaluation, to create and conduct the survey and analyze the results.
- ❖ Initial interviews with school leaders at 13 charter schools that had been re-chartered for their second 5 years. These interviews were designed to elicit school leaders' opinions of their best practices. Their responses were then used to formulate survey questions.
- ❖ Development of a survey consisting of 45 specific questions related to the information gathered plus demographics.
- ❖ The survey was professionally translated into Spanish and Khmer.
- ❖ Surveys were mailed to a sample of parents, teachers, administrators and other school personnel at all of the charter schools agreeing to participate in the study.
- ❖ Respondents filled out the survey forms and returned them anonymously to the Apsler survey team.

25 of 27 targeted schools participated in the survey
2,300 Questionnaires were distributed.
950 completed questionnaires were returned for a 41% response rate.

Survey Questions

SURVEY QUESTIONS

Joyce Epstein, Ph.D. and her group of researchers at Johns Hopkins University with the National Network of Partnership Schools have divided parent and community involvement into six major categories, as follows (2, p 14):

Type of Parent Involvement	Description
Parenting	Help all families establish home environments to support children as students
Communicating	Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and their children's progress
Volunteering	Recruit and organize parent help and support
Learning at Home	Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning.
Decision-Making	Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives
Collaborating with the Community	Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices and student learning and development.

Epstein, Joyce; Sanders, Mavis G. et al, School Family and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action, Second Edition.

The survey team took this framework as their starting point and divided the questions into those 6 categories. The survey then asked respondents to indicate—using a five-point Likert scale—how much they agreed or disagreed with the following statements:

PARENTING SKILLS/FAMILY SERVICES

1. A charter school should establish a resource center to provide information, materials and resource for parents and the community
2. A charter school should offer courses on parenting skills
3. If the community has these needs, a charter school should provide families with services such as literacy skill development, ESL, citizenship education, legal aid, translation services, healthcare resources and social services

PARENTING SKILLS/FAMILY SERVICES (cont.)

4. Charter school staff should learn about the students' family culture in order to develop a productive school-family partnership
5. A charter school should provide hands-on workshops for parents to help them develop computer skills and the ability to use the Internet.

COMMUNICATING

1. Each student, the student's parents, and the charter school should sign a contract stating everyone's role in the student's education.
2. Goal-setting and a written student individualized learning plan should be completed a least once a year among student, parent and teacher.
3. Mandatory parent-teacher conference meetings should occur: (not at all, once a year, twice a year, monthly, weekly)
4. Written progress reports for each student should be given to parents (not at all, once a year, twice a year, monthly, weekly)
5. A charter school should schedule curriculum nights, open houses, math/science fairs, art exhibitions, and other events inviting parents and the community to the school (not at all, once a year, twice a year, monthly, weekly)
6. A charter school should provide parents with a news bulletin (not at all, once a year, twice a year, monthly, weekly)
7. A charter school should schedule frequent meetings open to all parents to discuss issues and concerns.
8. A charter school should have regular informational meetings for parents to learn about MCAS, special education (SPED), and curriculum programs (such as math, language arts, etc.)
9. A charter school should have a policy to contact parents when good things happen regarding heir child's academic performance, behavior, or citizenship.
10. A charter school should maintain a website with essential, up-to-date information.
11. A charter School should provide non-English speaking parents with translations during conferences and meetings and for written reports.

VOLUNTEERING

1. A charter school should provide a full-time coordinator to actively encourage, nurture and manage parent involvement.
2. A charter school's expectations for parent involvement should be stated in a written policy.
3. Parents should be asked for ways in which they would like to volunteer
4. Parents should be invited to volunteer for specific activities as needed (*e.g.*, chaperoning, clerical help, "handyman" tasks, book fairs, cooking, fundraising, etc.)
5. A charter school should offer training for parents to become substitute teachers
6. A charter school should utilize parents' expertise to each enrichment workshops, provide career examples, develop internships for students, become reading or writing mentors, etc.

LEARNING AT HOME

1. A charter school should give parents information about how to help their children with homework.
2. A charter school should offer workshops to teach parents specific strategies to help their children learn.
3. A charter school should provide each student with an assignment book for recording daily assignments that can also be reviewed and signed by parents.
4. A charter school should make daily homework assignments accessible to parents by phone, e-mail, or through the school website

COLLABORATING WITH THE COMMUNITY

1. A charter school should partner with citizens and agencies to provide specialized learning opportunities for students (*e.g.*, artists-in-residence, drama coaches, after-school activities, mentors, internships, homework clubs, etc.)
2. A charter school should organize frequent events that bring together parents, the school, businesses, and other organizations to provide services for the community at large.
3. Community services should be an important component of each student's learning experience.

DECISION-MAKING

In this category most of the questions were framed somewhat differently. On 5 of the 6 different areas that were identified as decision-making occasions for schools, respondents were asked to judge whether parents "should be"

- ...the sole decision-makers
- ...the majority on all important decision-making communities
- ...equal partners with the educators and administration
- ...asked for input, but should not make the decisions
- ...parent input is not necessary on these types of decisions

The questions were:

1. For important **school policy decisions**, parents should be...
(choose from above)
2. For important **financial decisions**, parents should be...
(choose from above)
3. In decisions about **curriculum development**, parents should be...
(choose from above)
4. In **hiring new teachers**, parents should be...
(choose from above)
5. In the formal **evaluation of teachers and staff**, parents should be...
(choose from above)
6. A charter school should **train parents** to participate in governing the school.
(strongly disagree – strongly agree)

QUESTION: WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING WERE OBSTACLES?

- ❖ Lack of parent interest
- ❖ School staff resistance
- ❖ Parents do not have enough time
- ❖ Staff do not have enough time
- ❖ Lack of information about how parents can be involved
- ❖ Language barriers
- ❖ Anxiety about contacting the school
- ❖ No one is available to coordinate or organize parent involvement
- ❖ Other
- ❖ There are no obstacles

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

In addition, demographic data was collected pertaining to:

1. Male or female
2. Role in the school
3. How long their child has attended the charter school
4. What grades the children attended at the charter school
5. How long the person may have worked at the charter school
6. Where the parent attended school (inside or outside of the US)
7. Highest level of school completed
8. Primary language spoken at home
9. Racial identification

Three spaces were left for free-form responses in which respondents could describe successful parent involvement strategies that had been implemented at their school.

A copy of the actual survey may be found in the Survey section of this Manual and online on the project website.

Results of the survey may be found in the Survey Results section of this Manual.

Manual & Conference

The project's Conference, entitled The Many Faces of Parent Involvement: Making Parent Involvement Work for YOUR School, was held on October 1, 2003 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Worcester, Massachusetts. There were 13 presenters and 75 attendees.

The full Agenda for the day is included in this manual. For this Dissemination Project, we wanted to present all that we had learned at this conference: the results of the survey, some of the scholarship on parent involvement, but primarily our focus was to highlight the good, everyday work by those exploring how to engage parents in education, our 6 Charter School partners. In this Manual, you will find summaries of their presentations, along with samples of materials they use in their work: forms, newsletters, course outlines, interview formats and more.

BEST PRACTICES OF OUR SIX CHARTER SCHOOL PARTNERS

THE FAMILY SCHOOL CONNECTION AT THE HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL

Ain Grooms, Codman Academy Charter School

COLLABORATIVE DECISION-MAKING: PARENTS IN SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

Deirdre Arthen & Kate Richardson, Hillown Collaborative Charter School

PARENTS AS SUBSTITUTE TEACHERS IN THE CLASSROOM

Carmen Schumann & Lissette Aquino, Lawrence Family Development Charter School

ENGAGING PARENTS: PRACTICAL IDEAS FROM THE BUSINESS WORLD

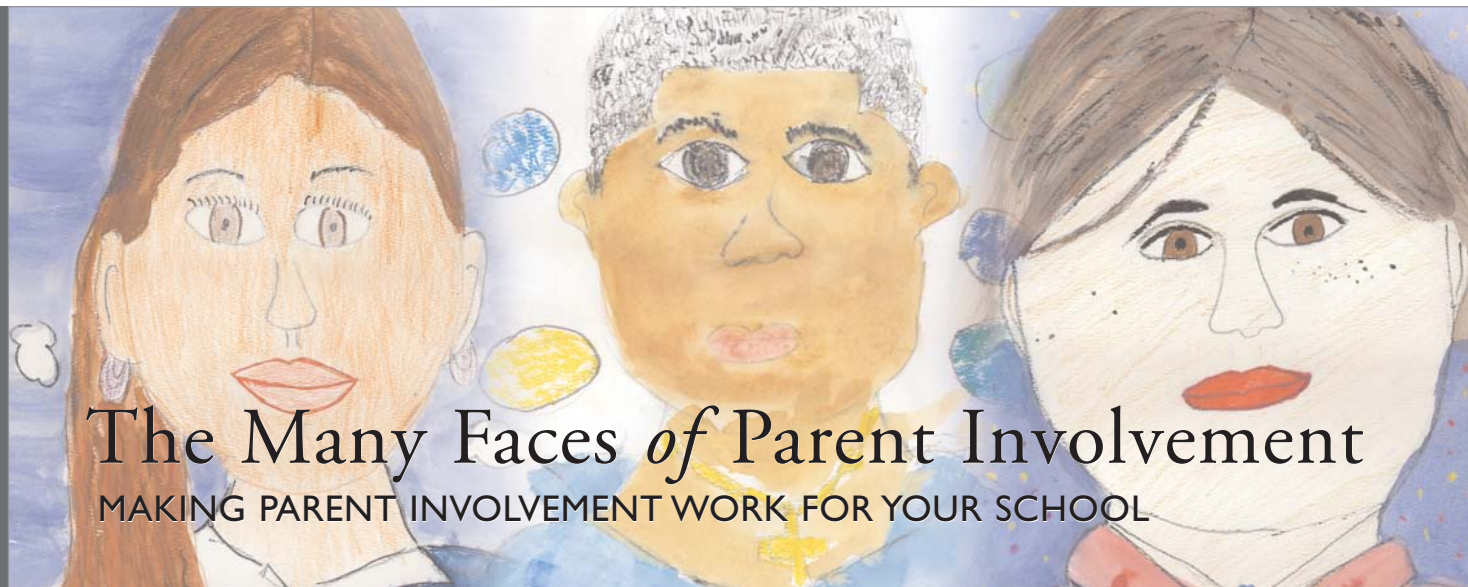
Mat Pilotte, Atlantis Charter School

LANGUAGE & CULTURE: MULTI-CULTURAL CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES


Pam Killilea & Rosa Payes, Lowell Community Charter School

THE FAMILY LEARNING CONTRACT: A TOOL TO SUPPORT PARENT VOLUNTEERISM & PARENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Felicia Smith & Christine Hardmon, Neighborhood House Charter School



The themes of the conference, that there are “many faces” to parent involvement and myriad ways that individual schools make it work, were echoed throughout our day as a diverse group of presenters shared their experiences.

On the next pages you will find summaries of the presentations of each of our Charter School partners, along with sample documents that they have used and found helpful in achieving their goals. When you see this icon  that is your clue that you will find a helpful document from one of the charter schools regarding this practice. It might be a survey form or a type of letter, but it's there for you to see what's been done and make your own adaptations.

In general readers have permission to use many of these forms just as they are; *however, where pages have a registration ® or a copyright © symbol, permission must be obtained directly from that organization in order to utilize a form.* For the rest of the documents, it is our suggestion that you take them as a starting point for devising your own Family Learning Contract or Volunteer Resource Form. If you keep reviewing your materials and your approach you will also notice changes that you can make that will keep them fresh, lively and useful for YOUR school.



Websites

The excellent website for the Harvard Family Research Project can be found at <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/index.html>. They also moderate a contributory discussion called FINE (Family Involvement Network of Educators) at <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/fine.html>.

Anne Greenbaum can be reached at Boston Excels at 617-927-0695

Boston Excels can be found at the website for The Home for Little Wanderers at [tp://www.thehome.org/site/content/bci/programs/programs.asp](http://www.thehome.org/site/content/bci/programs/programs.asp).

The Coalition for Community Schools can be found at <http://www.communityschools.org/>. Each of these organizations has extensive resources available on the Internet.

Conference Agenda

October 1, 2003—Worcester, Massachusetts

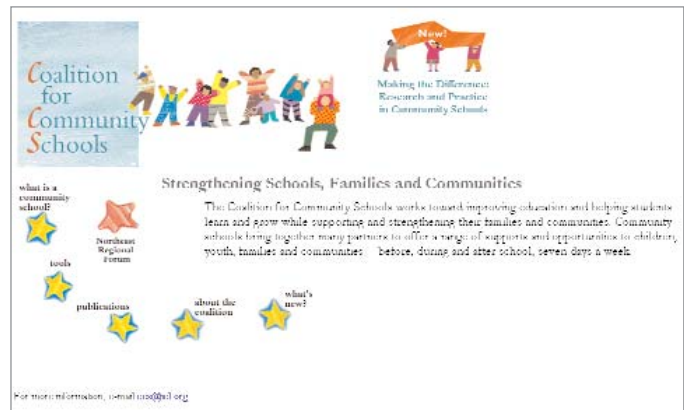
8:30-9:00AM	Registration/Breakfast
9:00-9:45	Welcome—Patricia Karl, Superintendent, LFDCS Survey Results—Robert Apsler, Ph.D.
10:00-10:45	<i>Reframing Parent Involvement</i> Holly Kreider, Ed.D. Harvard Family Research Project
10:45-11:45	6 Breakouts Best Practices Presenters from 6 Charter Schools
LUNCH	
12:30-1:30	6 Breakouts Best practices Presenters from 6 Charter Schools
1:30-2:30	<i>Full Service Community Schools: Improving Student Achievement Through Family Literacy</i> Anne Greenbaum, Director, Boston Excels
2:45-4:00	Action Planning Exercise Michael Rothman, Project for School Innovation
4:00-4:30	Wrap Up

About Our Guest Speakers

Our two Guest Speakers reinforced and validated this perspective.

ANNE GREENBAUM, MSW, the Director of Boston Excels, a full-service school model that is a partnership between The Home for Little Wanderers and the Boston Public Schools, delivered an interactive and energizing afternoon presentation on the Community Schools' school and family support approach.

This program asks the question: "What impacts kids' learning besides school?" And answers the question with a range of on-site social services, mental health, community development, family literacy, staff development and prevention programs tailored to each school. These efforts are aimed at addressing both the academic and non-academic barriers to learning and function to relieve some of the demands on teachers to "do it all." Boston Excels is part of the Coalition for Community Schools movement www.communityschools.org which promotes family and community partnerships nationwide. Both of these organizations have extensive resources available on the Internet, through publications and conferences. Boston Excels is currently operating programs in four Boston Public Elementary Schools.



The Coalition for Community Schools website.
www.communityschools.org

Anne shared with the conference attendees some of the family exercise in Math Literacy that Boston Excels has developed. See what happens when you involve YOUR family in the "Family Math Challenge" for Grades 3-5 included at the end of this Manual.

HOLLY KREIDER, Ed.D., from the Harvard Family Research Project, set the tone in her morning presentation "Reframing Parent Involvement." Through her research at the Harvard School of Education, she described the changes in concepts of parent involvement over the years. Where traditionally parent involvement was thought of as initiated *by* the school, located *at* the school, and generally concerned with student problems, now parent involvement has been reframed to focus on *knowing* families, *listening* to their histories, *learning* about cultures and helping parents work with children in the home.

She described a program at the University of Arizona where workers are taught to become "family ethnographers," who interview and listen to family stories, while they focus on strengths and the "funds of knowledge" families possess (6). Similarly, Sara Lawrence Lightfoot (4) and the Jane Addams School for Democracy (3,5) have pioneered methods of building trust with families, particularly those from immigrant cultures, by methods such as "learning circles" where community issues are discussed and everyone is a learner and a teacher.



The Harvard Family Research Project website.
www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/about/history.html

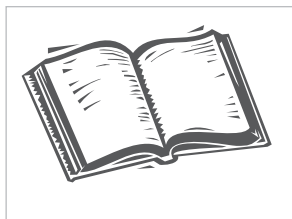
The Family School Connection at the High School Level

AIN GROOMS ♦ CODMAN ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL

MISSION OF THE SCHOOL

Codman Academy Charter School's mission is to prepare students for full participation in the intellectual, economic and civic life of our society, by ensuring their preparation for and access to further education, the skills and vision to undertake a rewarding career, and the motivation and character needed to engage deeply and productively in community life. We view parents and community members as integral partners in this endeavor.

Practices That Support the Mission



It is essential that our program establish a trusting and open relationship with the families we serve, so staff members are privy to the economic, cultural, and social challenges that our students may be facing, and appropriate action can be taken to provide the services the family needs to be an active partner in the child's education.

Based on our goals and objectives and grounded in our mission, a team of educators as CACS developed a plan for creating a strong family-school connection. The plan was devised and inspired by the best practices and programs already succeeding across the nation in early childhood education - the many home visit and family-school connection programs. Unable to find a program designed for use in an upper grade school, we devised our own plan from these examples and adapted a template for our high school program. The main pieces of our plan include Family Intake Meetings, a Welcome dinner, Parent Meeting Sessions and Family Outreach programs.

FAMILY INTAKE MEETING

The Head of School and/or Dean of Enrichment meets with the student and his/her parent(s)/guardian(s). All information gathered and shared during it is confidential and becomes part of the student's school record. The meeting normally lasts 45 minutes, and is divided into three sections: meeting with student and family together, meeting with parent alone, and meeting with student alone.

During the first part of the meeting, the CACS staff member thoroughly reviews the unique aspects of the school (including academics, conduct, school philosophy, school

days/hours, off-campus fieldwork sites, and dress code policies) with both the student and the parent(s). We gather information on the family's routines (see attachments), and as a way to get to know students better, we also ask about the student's name. The student then fills out a questionnaire regarding his or her goals while at CACS, and the student completes a writing sample while we meet individually with the parent/guardian. Parents often appreciate this time dedicated to private conversation, as it gives them the opportunity to speak candidly about their child. Following the meeting with the parent, we meet with the student to learn about his/her academic and leadership goals while the parent fills out a questionnaire, providing us with information on such things as community involvement, library use, and important family events in the child's lifetime.

We use this meeting to initiate a positive relationship with the family prior to the start of school. We want parents to feel comfortable discussing any aspects of their child's education and family life with members of the faculty. We have had 100% participation from all incoming families. In our May 2002 survey of our rising 10th grade families, 52 % reported that the Family Intake Meeting was helpful in setting the tone of the relationship between the school and family.

WELCOME DINNER

We feel the Welcome Dinner is a crucial aspect of our school community for numerous reasons. It gives students and parents the chance to meet each other and the faculty before the school has started. It helps family members become involved, right from the beginning. It also brings our community together. At the spring 2002 Welcome Dinner (to welcome students entering school in the fall of 2002), we invited parents from our current class to speak, and current ninth-graders volunteered to help serve food and welcome the new students. We see the Welcome Dinner as one of the many traditions of our school, created out of the need for inclusion of the family during this intense time of transition to high school. In the May 2002 survey, 45 % of the families responding stated that they felt the Welcome Dinner was helpful in introducing the family to CACS.

PARENT MEETINGS AND CONFERENCES

We firmly believe that by keeping parents informed we help them remain invested in their children's education. We have Parent Meetings once a month; here parents and the CACS Dean of Enrichment come together to discuss topics about which parents have expressed an interest, as well as topics that the faculty would like to share with the school community. Guest speakers have also been invited to Parent Meetings, such as the school nurse, who focused on nutrition and health, and a local banker who spoke on managing money. We have also created a Parent Advisory Group to keep parents abreast of many issues, ranging from uniform policies, to behavior/discipline issues, to classroom space.

In addition, we have formal Progress Report Meetings (also known as parent, student, and advisor conferences) two times per year. In the fall of 2001, we had 100% participation at our Progress Report Meetings. During these meetings, the advisor, the parent(s) and the student review the student's academic progress throughout the term. The stu-

dent is also expected to bring a piece of work or accomplishment that he or she is proud of, giving the student the opportunity to show his or her growth over the course of the grading period. In our May 2002 survey, 40% of parents responding reported that they had attended four or more monthly Parent Meetings, and 33 % reported they had had five or more phone conversations/informal meetings with faculty members during the 2001-2002 school year.

OPEN-DOOR POLICY

Parents are welcome to stop by the school at any time, unannounced, and sit in on classes, talk with teachers, or participate in school-wide events, such as our weekly Community Circle (a whole school gathering, once per week, led by students). We also invite parents to accompany faculty and students on fieldwork visits. These are full day trips (to the Huntington Theatre, colleges, museums, etc.) during which students work offsite. We feel it is always helpful to have an extra adult with us, especially one who is invested in the school. Joining our trips also gives parents the opportunity for a hands-on account of what their child is learning in school.

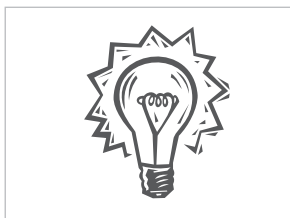
Observable Outcomes of the Practice



In May 2002 the CACS Dean of Enrichment conducted a survey of parents, in order to get their input on the school and their children's academic achievement. 97% of parents responded, and of those, 61% reported that their child's academic performance has improved since enrolling in CACS.

- ❖ 100% attendance at Progress Report Meeting
- ❖ Increased number of parents visiting the school
- ❖ In our first year, 75% of parents gave Codman an overall grade of A or B.

TIPS: Advice to Other Schools for Implementing this Type of Practice



- ❖ Staff buy-in and support of increasing family involvement
- ❖ Staff person devoted to increasing family support (point person)

Ain Grooms is the Dean of Enrichment at Codman Academy Charter School in Dorchester. Part of her responsibilities include increasing family involvement, college planning, community partnerships and advising students. She helped to create the position of Dean of Enrichment, an idea that grew out of her deep commitment to helping launch urban youth on a path to college and successful careers.

Codman Academy Family Meeting Information Survey for Parents

[please note: writing space has been reduced for the sake of space, eds.]

Parent/Guardian: _____ Student: _____ Date: _____

We have prepared the following survey to collect information about Codman Academy students and their families. Our aim is to evaluate how the school can best meet the needs of the children and families we serve. Any information you offer will be kept CONFIDENTIAL and will NOT be used to assess your student's performance. Thank you for your honesty in answering the following questions.

Does your family currently have a library card? (Circle one) Yes No

If yes, to which library? _____

How many visits has your family made to the library in the past year? (Check one)

- ☐ None
- ☐ 1 to 2
- ☐ 3-5
- ☐ Once every month
- ☐ Once every week
- ☐ Once every day

Does your family currently subscribe to any periodicals (magazines, journals or newspapers)?
(Circle one) Yes No

If yes, please list: _____

On average, how many hours per week does your family spend reading (books, magazines, newspapers)? _____ hours/week

On average, how many hours per week is the TV on in your home? _____ hours/week

On average, how many hours per week does your student watch TV?
_____ hours/week

Do you currently have a computer at home? (Circle one) Yes No
Do you have Internet access at home? (Circle one) Yes No

On average, how many hours per week is the computer used in your home?
_____ hours/week

How many people use the computer in your home?

_____ people out of _____ members of your household

How is your home computer used? (For example: to play computer games; to do homework; to browse the internet...)

Does your family currently have a fitness center membership? (Circle one) Yes No

If yes, to which fitness center?

How many visits has your family made to the fitness center in the past year? (Check one)

- ☐ None
- ☐ 1 to 2
- ☐ 3 to 5
- ☐ Once every month
- ☐ Once every week
- ☐ Once every day

Does your family have a membership to any museums or other educational or cultural institutions? (Circle one) Yes No

If yes, which museums or other institutions?

How frequently has your family visited a museum or other educational or cultural institution in the past year? (Check one)

- ☐ None
- ☐ 1 to 2
- ☐ 3-5
- ☐ Once every month
- ☐ Once every week
- ☐ Once every day

Has anyone in your family attended or contributed to a community event or project over the past year? (Circle one) Yes No

If yes, please describe the event or project: (For example: community dinner, fund drive, workshop, lecture, town meeting...)

Did you or another parent/guardian visit your student's school this year (during 8th grade)?

(Circle one) Yes No

If yes, how many times this year? _____ times this year

If yes, what was the nature of your visit(s)? (For example: parent conference, parent's night, student performance, conference with guidance counselor, conference with special needs counselor...)

If no, do you have any suggestions for how Codman Academy could better involve you in your student's educational experience?

How many children in your family currently receive free or reduced lunch? _____

Is there any additional information about your student or family that would be helpful for Codman Academy to know?



Codman Academy Family Meeting

Family Routines



Student: _____

Date: _____

In Attendance:

What is your current school day routine?

Morning (When do you wake up? How do you get to school?):

Daytime (What is the school day like? What do you do at lunch? What do you enjoy/dislike about school?):

After-school (What do you do when school finishes? How do you get home? When do other family members get home? What happens at dinner? Where/when do you do homework?):

What is your current weekend routine (friends, family, activities, homework)?

What did you do last summer?

Discussion of Codman routine:

Schedule (9-5 Monday-Friday, Saturday 9-noon, one day per week off-campus)

Summer requirements (2 summers approved programming)

Graduation requirements (AP course, 3+ yrs English, 3+ math, 2 yrs lab sci, 2 yrs foreign, 2 yrs hist)

ELOB philosophy (service, study & leadership intertwined; crew expectations, responsibility for learning)

Health & fitness/electives

Commitment to school-family partnerships (participation, communication & feedback)

Code of conduct

Dress code

How do you expect your current routine to change now that you are a student at Codman Academy?

School day:

After-school (extracurricular, service, homework):

Weekend:

Summer (brainstorm programming?)

Family support

Access to computer/internet:

Other:

Do you have any additional questions or concerns?



Codman Academy Family Meeting Student Goals Sheet



Student: _____

Date: _____

We're interested in hearing about your goals for being a student at Codman Academy. During your time here, we'll adjust and revisit these goals periodically to make sure you're reaching your dreams.

What are your goals as a student at Codman Academy?

What are your goals for being a leader at Codman Academy?

What are your goals for contributing to the community while at Codman Academy?

What do you consider to be your greatest strengths?

How would you like most to improve?

Anything special we should know about you? (Hobbies, interests, etc.)

What questions do you have about Codman Academy?

Codman Academy Family Meeting Student Writing Sample

Choose one of the following writing topics and write a composition with at least 4 paragraphs. Take time to think about what you would like to say before you begin writing. Please use the space below as your Idea Page and turn this in with your essay.*

Option 1: Why do you want to attend and graduate from Codman Academy Charter School?

Option 2: What is your “grand passion” in life?

Option 3: What is your greatest fear?

My Ideas/Notes:



Codman Academy Parent Meeting



Student: _____

Date: _____

In Attendance: _____

What do you consider to be your child's strengths?

Areas for Improvement?

What special interests or hobbies does your child have that you would like to see encouraged?

Discouraged?

How would you describe your child socially? Many friends? Few friends? Shy? Outgoing? Is she/he more of a leader or a follower?

Are there any special needs or services your child has? (Glasses, medical conditions, disabilities, IEPs, etc.) Explain.

What interests, talents, or hobbies of yours would you be willing to sharing with the Codman Academy Community?

Questions/Comments:

Collaborative Decision-Making: Parents in School Governance

DEIDRE ARTHEN & KATE RICHARDSON ♦ HILLTOWN COLLABORATIVE CHARTER SCHOOL

MISSION OF THE SCHOOL

The Hilltown Cooperative Charter School was founded in 1995 as a Massachusetts Public Charter School. Our mission is:

- ♦ To engage students in a school which uses experiential, hands-on activities, the arts, and interdisciplinary studies to foster critical thinking skills and a joy of learning.
- ♦ To sustain a cooperative, intimate community of students, staff, families and local community members, which guides and supports the school and its educational program.
- ♦ To cultivate children's individual voices and a shared respect for each other, our community, and the world around us.

Philosophy

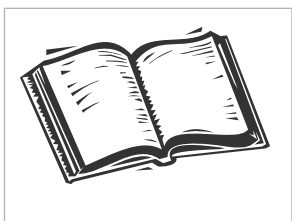
The Hilltown Cooperative Charter School (HCCS) was founded in 1995 as Massachusetts Public Charter School. Inspired by the pre-schools of Reggio Emilia in Italy, our educational approach is grounded in knowledge of children's development and in a commitment to teaching creative, critical thinking skills and strong basic skills.

At HCCS, we believe that children construct their understanding of the world through direct experience with teachers serving as guides and resources. We create an engaging and joyful learning environment using an interdisciplinary, project-based curriculum. Emphasis is placed on asking children and adults to reflect on and document the learning process. The expressive arts play a critical role in the academic and social curriculum, and create a common language that brings our community together in meaningful ways.

HCCS welcomes and relies on family involvement. Children, families, school and community form an integrated, interdependent system which operates through an inclusive, consensus-based governance structure. Beyond academic curriculum, children learn essential life skills through participation in an intimate, whole school cooperative. Involvement in the local environment and its communities inspires learning and encourages social and civic responsibility as well as stewardship for the earth.

Parents and teachers help children to care for and respect themselves and each other. We strongly believe that cultivation of each individual voice within a community leads to inclusion of and respect for differences and multiple perspectives.

Practices that Support the Mission



PARENTS IN SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

A Consensus Model

Family involvement is integral to the underlying philosophy and mission of The Hilltown Cooperative Charter School. The school was founded in 1995 by a group of parents, artists and educators and since the beginning parents have been at the center of the operation of the school.

They make up the majority of the Board of Trustees and the majority of all of the major standing committees of the school as well as providing a strong source of ongoing volunteers. Decision-making groups operate using a consensus model.

Consensus is distinct from the more standard voting process, the result of which reflects only a majority view. Instead, a consensus decision hinges upon whether or not all of the parties involved can reach a mutually satisfactory level of agreement. The strong objections of even one participant can be enough to block the adoption of a proposal. This approach provides a built-in incentive for the majority to respect and to integrate minority views and shifts the focus away from individual positions onto the collective decision to be made. And, because the final decision reflects an integrated common ground, consensus substantially reduces the divisions that result from dissatisfaction, and agreement tends to be more widespread and long-lasting. This enhances the group's ability to continue making good decisions in the future.

GOVERNANCE AT HCCS

Consensus of the whole community was the cornerstone of the first few years of the Hilltown School. After several years of growth however, the school, needing a more formal form of governance, developed a four "domain" structure to carry out all school functions and to address issues: **The Board of Trustees, Educational Domain, Administrative Domain, and Family Domain.** The Management Team, a representative body from all Domains, was defined as a place to manage and enhance communication among the domains and to coordinate "multi-domain" issues and decisions. The Domain Council, composed of the Coordinators of all Domains is a body that makes recommendations directly to the Board of Trustees regarding policy and budget.

Establishing and working with the four domains accomplished several goals related to building a structure to support the school's collaborative and cooperative goals:

- ❖ Provide open access to all members of the community
- ❖ Provide a model of participatory deliberation and decision-making
- ❖ Provide clarity for where and how decisions are made.
- ❖ Provide clarity for how issues are discussed and initiatives can be presented to the community

The work of each domain—with the exception of the Board of Trustees—is coordinated by a paid administrator. A central challenge of each administrator is to navigate an optimum balance between the need for efficiency, given the daily demands of management engaged in ongoing dialogue with domain members, and consensus decision-making.

The **Board**, by definition of the state charter school laws, is responsible for the mission, educational philosophy, and major policies of the school. As such, it oversees and periodically assesses the school's finances, programs and management.

The **Educational Domain** has responsibility for all aspects of the educational program, including curriculum, grouping of students, space use, and student assessment.

The **Administrative Domain** has responsibility for all non-educational operations of the school, including financial management, physical plant, office and record-keeping, and medical issues.

Finally, the **Family Domain's** purpose is particularly unique and central to fulfilling the school's community mission, that is, "to support and foster the cooperative, inclusive, expressive culture of HCCS." It is the primary structure for nurturing and coordinating the involvement of school families and the greater "outside" community. Central to this task is organizing and coordinating the Cooperative—the heart and core of the school.

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT AT THE HILLTOWN SCHOOL

While parent and community involvement has been basic to the school's operation since its founding, the domain structure helps HCCS effectively respond to increased school size and the shifting priorities of a school moving beyond its founding mindset.

Following are some descriptions of how families are involved at the Hilltown School, particularly as coordinated through the Family Domain as it strives to support the greater cooperative, policy and procedural guidelines, as well as day-to-day administrative and program management.

MEMBERSHIP IN THE COOPERATIVE

All parents are encouraged to become members of the governing cooperative, and through this to join the Board of Trustees and other committees which make policy decisions. An individual membership (renewable annually) in the Cooperative enables parents to participate in decision making at the annual meeting, including the selection of members to the Board of Trustees and changes in the school's by-laws. Membership also provides the framework of an expectation of active parent participation at the school. Membership is based on the investment of an average of at least four hours of volunteer work at the school per month.

Through the membership system, parents become involved in every aspect of the day to day operation of the school. Not only are they invited into any classroom at virtually all times, they are also involved in the hiring and annual evaluation of teachers and administrative staff. They hold the majority of places on the Board of Trustees and participate in and chair many committees, including finance, long-range planning, personnel and site. In addition, they are involved at the school through the teaching of mini-courses, construction and repair of the facility, managing and coordinating community-service projects, and initiating new programs within the educational domain. Over 90% of families at the school volunteer during the school year and in May, 2003, an impressive

84% of the 109 families at Hilltown had one or more adult who was a member of the cooperative—volunteering at least 4 hours a month at the school.

Information often equals power in an institution, and communication with families is a high priority at the Hilltown School. Parents are asked to come into the building during the school week to collect their children, view the bulletin boards and pick up school mail from their individual mailboxes—a system that keeps parents directly in line with information. Frequent e-mails, a weekly newsletter in the mailboxes and occasional mailings also keep families up-to-date with what is happening throughout the school. Summaries of all Board and Committee meetings are posed on bulletin boards within 48 hours of the meetings, so that there is plenty of opportunity for parents to make timely responses to the actions being planned and taken. The fact that parents are invited into the classrooms at almost any time greatly increases their access to information; they are in the building that much more often. With this kind of information available, parents have proven to be strong advocates for their children and for the school's development.

AN EXAMPLE OF THE PROCESS: The Hiring of Teachers

In keeping with the cooperative governance structure, parents are major participants in the hiring of both teachers and administrative personnel.

The Education Coordinator has the final authority to hire teachers, but the process through which hiring decisions are made is clearly spelled out and includes full participation by both parents and existing staff. At HCCS the Hiring Committee for a teacher consists of the Education Coordinator, a current teacher, a parent and a member of the Board of Trustees (who may also be a parent). The members of this group read all the resumes and letters received in response to advertising, and they rank the applicants on a numeric scale. A meeting is held in which the committee discusses the resumes, and schedules interviews with the candidates—those who receive the most top ratings and those whom any member of the committee feels very strongly should be included. After all the first interviews are finished, the committee decides, by consensus, which candidates to invite back for a second round.

If a candidate is selected he/she returns to the school to teach a sample lesson, which is observed by the full committee and by the other teachers in the school. After the lesson, the committee meets with the teachers to hear their response to the candidate. All parents in the school are informed about the hiring process as it goes on and are invited to an open meeting, after the sample lessons, to ask the candidates questions. Generally, the open meetings are well attended and often they include many of the families whose children will be in the new teacher's classroom the following year. Afterwards the Hiring Committee takes written responses from parents. Once this process has been completed, the Hiring Committee meets again to arrive at consensus about whether to offer the position to one of the candidates. Generally this process runs smoothly, but sometimes more than one meeting is required.

This may seem an extraordinary process in comparison with those used by most public schools, but it is based on the assumption that both parents and teachers have significant experience and knowledge to contribute, and that their opinions about who will be the best teacher for a certain classroom are not only valid but essential. The hiring process for the Administrator, Community Coordinator and Education Coordinator of the school are very similar, with parents having a strong voice in the decision.

CONCLUSION

The process and structure of governing at the Hilltown School is more cooperative and democratic than those utilized in traditional schools. As a laboratory, the Hilltown School is taking advantage of one of the most important aspects of charter school legislation: the privilege to shift the power structure from one that is bureaucratic and hierarchical to one that is more participatory and inclusive. Crucial to the success of these innovations is creating a culture of cooperation and involvement which in itself depends on such power alterations.

The possibility for implementing these ideas (in their richest sense) in other schools is largely tied to the ability to model participatory systems throughout a school. Administrative structures and decision-making processes must allow families and students more control than is generally accommodated in traditional schools.

What we have learned at the Hilltown Cooperative Charter School is that community is about trust, involvement, and a collective commitment to working together. When the system is structured to provide a variety of openings to parents and community members—busy and burdened ones as well as those who are more available—and their concerns are reflected in the life of the school, learning is a deep and rich experience.

This is adapted from an article written in 2001 by Deirdre Pulgram Arthen, the Community Coordinator at the Hilltown Cooperative Charter School. Andras Corban Arthen and Chris Spicer, both past presidents of the Board of Trustees of the Hilltown Cooperative Charter School. All three authors are also parents of students enrolled at the school. The full text of the article is available on line at: www.masscharterschools.org

Observable Outcomes of the Practice



STUDENTS AND PARENTS CREATE CHANGE AT HILLTOWN

Our school was a K-6 school for the first 5 years of its existence. In 1999 when the first real class of students to go be here throughout their school “career” reached sixth grade, they decided that they didn’t want to leave yet and that the school should expand to include grades 7 and 8. Some students before them had had the same idea the past two years, but their parents had been discouraged by a luke-warm reception, at best, from the administration and the Board of Trustees.

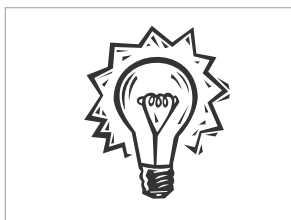
This group of students didn’t want to take “no” for an answer so they asked their parents for help. Over the course of several months the parents of almost every sixth grader in the school worked together with the students to envision a middle-school addition. They built a proposal and took it to the Board of Trustees. They held a full community meeting, talked with the teachers at staff meetings and built a committee that included not only parents of those students, but members of the Board who were not parents and parents of younger children as well. The process of gaining approval from the Board was an intense one—there was not agreement among the Board or among the staff that the addition should happen in the time frame that would serve this group of students. The Board turned down the proposal outright one time and the students responded by pick-

eting the school. Parents revised their proposal and brought it to the Board one more time and it was approved in its modified form.

The 7-8 program has been in place at Hilltown now for four years. Those students who created it have graduated and moved on to successful years in high school and the current students in the class are learning and thriving in an environment that supports them in many ways that a larger middle-school could not.

This collaboration of students, parents, staff and members of the Board of Trustees in creating a major change in the educational structure of the school was built on the school's foundation of cooperation. All parties were experienced in listening to each other and all parties had the expectation that their voice would be heard clearly. The process itself was an education for the students in strategizing, planning and developing a successful and high-stakes proposal in a respectful manner. The intense involvement and commitment of the parents over the years modeled for the students a way to have an impact on their own education and the governance structure of the school allowed room for them to have an impact.

TIPS: Advice to Other Schools for Implementing this Type of Practice



- ❖ Develop an “expectation of inclusion” in the parent body—show parents that their voices are sought after, listened to and included in decision-making at the school.
- ❖ Choose parent representatives to attend and participate in staff, committee and administrative meetings.
- ❖ Include parents in the hiring process for teachers and administrators.
- ❖ Open classrooms to parents during the school day and train teachers in ways to use their help when they're there.
- ❖ Host a weekly in school “open house” or “coffee hour” for parents with staff present to discuss current school issues or concerns.
- ❖ Regularly post minutes from administrative, committee and School Board meetings in a Newsletter or on an accessible bulletin board.
- ❖ Hold regular community discussions and social events and for staff and parents together so they can get to know each other and build trust.

Deirdre Pulgram Arthen, MA, is the Community Coordinator at the Hilltown Cooperative Charter School where she supports the functioning of the participatory cooperative governance. She coordinates parent volunteers coming to the school, arranges workshops for parents, plans community meetings and events, builds relationships between the school and other community agencies and organizes community service learning projects and other volunteer opportunities for students. She has been a parent at the school for 8 years and has held her current position for the last 3.

Kate Richardson is the President of the Board of Trustees of Hilltown Cooperative Charter School. She has been a parent at the school for 9 years and over that time has worked extensively on the governance structure of the school. She also coaches Hilltown's Ultimate Frisbee team.

The Hilltown Cooperative Charter School

Community Compact of Understanding

At the Hilltown Cooperative Charter School we believe that education works best as a cooperative process among teachers, staff, parents, students and the community at large. We believe that parents' involvement in their children's education contributes greatly toward their success and the school relies on its cooperative structure to create the innovative and alternative educational environment that is at the core of its mission. This compact of understanding is a way of clearly stating our common commitment to collaboration in creating a learning community that nourishes and supports all of its members.

The administration and staff of the Hilltown Cooperative Charter School pledge to:

- provide a safe, cooperative and respectful environment for learning.
- believe that all students can succeed and learn.
- nurture each child's innate creativity and encourage his/her self-expression using many modalities.
- communicate and work with your family to support your child's learning.
- have challenging expectations for students and staff.
- seek out and value parent participation and input in all areas of the school community.
- respect and honor the cultural differences of students and their families.
- seek to improve our program through an ongoing cycle of planning, evaluation and refinement.

I _____, Teacher and _____, Coordinator
Pledge the school staff's commitment to the above stated responsibilities and ideals. Date: _____

The Parent pledges to:

- read the school handbook and abide by the policies and guidelines set out in it.
- to the very best of my ability, give 4 hours of volunteer service per month, or 40 hours per year, that will benefit the school and help my child and others learn.
- ensure that my child arrives at school on time (8:20am), rested and ready to learn.
- ensure that my child comes to school each day dressed appropriately for the weather and with a nutritious lunch and snack.
- help my child take responsibility for completing home-study assignments in a timely manner.
- keep myself informed and up to date about events and issues at school by reading the notices in my mailbox, newsletters, e-mails and posted announcements.
- attend at least two individual parent/teacher conferences and one classroom meeting per year.
- help strengthen the school community by participating in events and discussions whenever possible.
- show respect and support for my child, other students, the staff and the school.

I, _____, Parent/legal guardian(s) agree to do my best to follow through with the responsibilities listed above. Date: _____
A parent's ability to follow through on this agreement will in no way impact their child's acceptance or dismissal from the school.

The Student pledges to:

- do my best to learn while in classes and when doing the home-study I am assigned.
- show respect for myself, my school, my teachers, other people, and materials.
- be inclusive of others and resolve conflicts in a positive, non-violent manner.
- take responsibility for my actions and my safety.
- believe that I am a person who can learn in many different ways.

I, _____, Student, will do my best to keep this agreement.
Date: _____

Hilltown Cooperative Charter School Volunteer Resource Form 2002 – 2003

Name: _____

(each parent should fill out his/her own form - Please print neatly)

Children's Names and Classes: _____

Home Phone Number: _____

Street Address: _____

Work Phone Number *: _____

Email Address *: _____

* **Important:** Next to the asterisked * items above, please write the words "office only" if you would prefer to have the information not be included in a directory distributed to all school families.

I can volunteer best _____ in an ongoing role for the school that fits into a regular schedule
_____ by taking on responsibility for one project at a time _____ on a specific task by task basis
_____ by filling in in a pinch

I am most often available:

Monday morning _____	Wednesday afternoon _____	Friday evening _____
Monday afternoon _____	Wednesday evening _____	Saturday morning _____
Monday evening _____	Thursday morning _____	Saturday afternoon _____
Tuesday morning _____	Thursday afternoon _____	Saturday evening _____
Tuesday afternoon _____	Thursday evening _____	Sunday morning _____
Tuesday evening _____	Friday morning _____	Sunday afternoon _____
Wednesday morning _____	Friday afternoon _____	Sunday evening _____

Participate in School Governance

(these positions may require an election process)

Board of Trustees _____ Friends of Hilltown Board _____

Parent Rep to Management Team _____

Join a Committee:
(As space becomes available)

Admissions Committee:
Committee Member ____
Tour Guide ____
Develop flyers ____
Postering in my town ____

Finance Committee: ____

Facilities Committee: ____
(help make this place beautiful)

Personnel Committee: ____
Technology Committee: ____

Diversity Committee: ____

New Site work group ____

Events Committee ____

Help with a particular event or activity:

Open House for Prospective Students (1/03)

Clean up and/or set up ____
Provide refreshments ____
Tour guide for parents & students ____

Annual Coop meeting (5/02) ____

Clean up and/or set up ____
Hand out information packets ____
Refreshments ____

Trip Planning & Fundraising Committee

For Prisms Class ____
For Purples Class ____
For Reds Class ____

Graduation Committee ____

Community Service Committee ____

Book and Craft Fair – December ____

Winter Solstice Celebration ____

Art Spark ____

End of Year Summer Celebration ____

Help Build the Hilltown Cooperative

Community Events Committee:

Core Committee Member ____
Community Service/Outreach Events ____
In-school social events ____
Community-building events ____
Speakers and/or workshops ____
Set-up/Clean-up ____

Be a "Link Family" - (summer 2003) ____
Help produce the Hilltown community directory
phone calls ____
data entry ____
Desktop publishing ____

Host a networking dinner or brunch
for school parents ____

General Resources:

Office Work:

Type (word processing)
At school ____ At home ____
Assemble, collate and staple materials ____
Stuff mailboxes and envelopes ____
Data entry ____
Answer telephone ____

File ____
Photocopy ____

I can substitute for:

Teachers ____
Teaching Assistants ____
Administrative Assistant ____
School Nurse ____ (requires RN or more)

Archives/Library

Update and maintain teachers' library ____
 Keep archives of events and news ____

Chaperone/Drive:

Field Trips ____
 Mini-courses ____

During or after school:

Class Parent ____
 Chorus Assistant ____
 Document classroom activities ____
 (requires training)
 Classroom helper ____
 Tutor/homework assistance after school ____
 Supervise other after school activities/clubs ____
 Supervise lunch rooms ____
 Supervise student computer use ____
 Supervise recess (midday) ____
 Lead outdoor games and activities at recess ____

Building Maintenance and Renovation:

Serious construction ____
 Paint ____
 General cleaning ____
 Carpentry ____
 Assemble furniture or equipment ____
 Minor repairs ____
 Mechanical repairs ____

The Newsletter:

Coordinate "Community Resources" page ____
 Stuff in mailboxes ____

Community Service

Coordinate Adopt-a-Highway ____
 Help with ongoing projects ____
 Hampshire Care Service Learning ____

Fundraising:

Write grants ____
 Ask local organizations or businesses for contributions / donations ____
 Coordinate a fundraiser ____ (New ideas? _____)

Miscellaneous (and very important) :

Make telephone calls (for teachers, office, or committees) ____
 Bake ____
 Provide refreshments ____
 Coordinate Lost and Found ____
 Kitchen maintenance ____
 Playground maintenance ____
 Computer maintenance/repair: software ____ hardware ____
 Create flyers ____
 Make posters ____
 Provide child-care during events ____

I own and would be glad to use for Hilltown purposes:

A pick-up truck ____ A cargo van ____ A passenger van ____
 A large utility truck ____ Other useful equipment (please specify) _____

I have desktop publishing skills and can help produce materials / reports for the school. ____

I would be happy to speak to students about my job as a: _____

I could arrange a tour of my place of work or other special place, which is: _____

I work as a professional _____ and would be happy to donate the following services to the school if they are needed:

I can donate these useful items to the school:

I would be happy to speak with students about my family's cultural traditions.

General description:

I have a hobby, interest, or special experience I would be willing to share with students during school hours:

I am interested in being the advisor for an after-school activity (chess, math or outdoor club, Frisbee team, scouts, "Destination Imagination"...):

I would like to offer a Mini Course on:

Possible Mini-course sessions for me:

☐ Oct. 2-23 ☐ Nov. 13 – Dec4 ☐ Jan22-Feb 12 ☐ Feb. 26-March19 ☐ April 9- May 6

Please include my business listing in the Hilltown Directory. ☐

Description in 15 words or less:

Other ideas?

Call me !  You never know what I might be able to do. ☐

Thank you for taking the time to respond.

(form design with thanks to the Odyssey Community School, Manchester, CT)

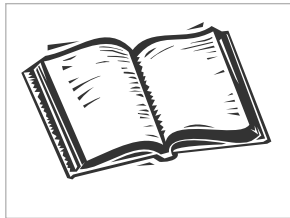
Parents as Substitute Teachers in the Classroom

CARMEN SCHUMANN & LISSETTE AQUINO ♦ LAWRENCE FAMILY DEVELOPMENT CHARTER SCHOOL


MISSION OF THE SCHOOL

Strong families, working in partnership with the school as advocates for academic achievement, will create an environment where every child has the opportunity to acquire the foundation skills and habits of mind that foster life-long learning, citizenship participation, and personal fulfillment.

Practices That Support the Mission



PARENT TRAINING TO ASSIST LEARNING IN THE CLASSROOM & HOME

Lawrence Family Development Charter School offers a training program for parents of our students to introduce them to the skills and responsibilities necessary to assist us as emergency substitute teachers, recess monitors, classroom volunteers and after-school program staff. During this 15 hour program (5 sessions/3 hours each) parents are introduced to foundational information in child development, school mission and policies, school discipline expectations and the goals of each program. Parents are also given introductory information regarding legal requirements of working or volunteering in a school environment with particular emphasis on school restraint policies and the purpose of 51A. Parents learn skills, which can be utilized in diverse school support positions and, of equal importance, for use at home in helping and encouraging their own children to greater academic achievement. 

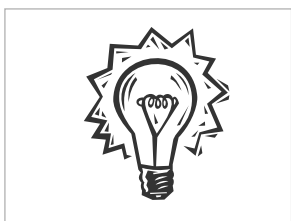
Observable Outcomes of the Practice




- ♦ Parents have a better understanding of child development—understanding age appropriate activities, language use, physical change, age appropriate games, school and household responsibilities, time for homework and bed-time.
- ♦ Parents are introduced to and are able to apply behavior management and discipline techniques, and develop an understanding of cultural and legal differences regarding physical punishment, and the importance of high expectations for language and verbal skills.

- ❖ Comfort with asking open-ended questions to increase vocabulary, language skills, conversation and problem solving at school and in the home.
- ❖ Increased readiness to use formal and informal learning opportunities in the home (ex. games).
- ❖ Better understanding of the goals of Special Education resulting in an increased willingness to accept school referral for SPED testing.
- ❖ Better understanding of the roles and responsibilities of teachers/staff.
- ❖ Feeling welcome in the school environment and a strong sense of ownership of the school.
- ❖ Recognition that school validates their role as child's first teacher.
- ❖ Marketable job skills with potential for growth.

TIPS: Advice to Other Schools for Implementing this Type of Practice



- ❖ Before embarking on this path, take the time to convince school administrators that educating parents will make them better partners in educating their children.
- ❖ Create time and space for parents to practice what they have learned before you call them to substitute. For example: *Parents should shadow a classroom teacher and then be observed practicing the skills they have learned.*
- ❖ Parent substitutes will have fears around certain issues such as the legalities related to disciplinary procedures. Ensure they have the tools and support they need to get the job done.
- ❖ Recruit parents for the training program by showing them how the knowledge they will acquire will provide them with job/income opportunities and skills they can use to help their own children learn.
- ❖ Don't mix participants with vastly different educational attainment levels in the same training group.
- ❖ Ask program graduates who are substitute teaching for classroom feedback so you can continuously evaluate and improve your program. 

Carmen Schumann, M.S. Administration, *Head of Lower School—Lawrence Family Development Charter School—has been involved for more than a decade in adult education in the City of Lawrence. Trainer/Leader of Parent Mobilization Project—developing advocacy skills for parent/founders of Lawrence Family Development Charter School. National presenter on Parent Involvement in Education.*

Lisette Aquino, *Parent Outreach Coordinator, Lawrence Family Development Charter School. Bachelors candidate at Springfield College, parent of students at Lawrence Family Development Charter School, Ms. Aquino began as a volunteer through Project Read, trained in the Substitute Teacher Program, and became the Assistant to the Family Center Program.*

Lawrence Family Development Charter School

Substitute Teacher Training Course Outline

Section I—About Our School

- Understanding Mission and Goals
- Available Services
- Code of Conduct/School Policies
- Emergency Protocol
- Report Completion
- Chain of Command
- Dress Code
- Time Sheets
- List of Expectations

Section II—Working in the Classroom

- Following Lesson Plans/6 Elements of a Lesson Plan
- Strategies for Focusing and Motivating Students
- Substitutes Bag of Tricks/Additional Activities

Section III—Foundation of Knowledge

- Discipline
- Behavior Management
- Interaction with Students
- Conduct of Students/Code of Conduct

Section IV—Special Education

- Understanding Learning Disabilities

Section V—Substitute Teacher Policies and Paperwork

- Attendance Policies
- Class Lists
- Morning Routines/Schedules
- Follow-up of Daily Activities



Lawrence Family Development Charter School qualifies as a **School Wide Title One Program** offering small classes to support learning the core subjects for all students. Title One funding assists us in providing strong parent involvement and family education programs, such as the **Substitute Teachers Training**, a **Reading Teacher for grades 1-4**, and a **Summer Institute in Language Arts and Math** to improve academic skills.



Presenters

Samita McIntire: School Principal
Carmen R. Schumann: Head of Lower School
Endreolina Vazquez: Head of Upper School
Jennifer Ryan, Faculty
Miriam Hernandez: Faculty
Natalia Elias-Calles: Support Center Teacher
Zoraida LeBren, Training Coordinator
Collaborating Staff: Linda Cornell and Lisette Aquino



"Strengthening Family... Building Community"

Lawrence Family Development Charter School
Lawrence, MA 01841



Lawrence Family Development Charter School

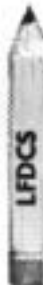
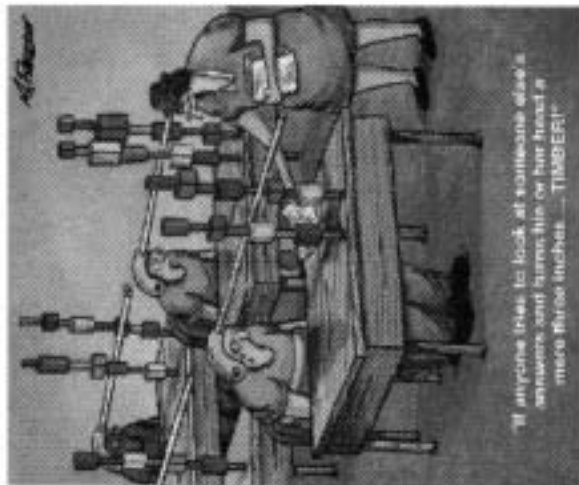
"Substitute Teacher Training"



Special Education Students

Understanding Learning

Disabilities: Participants will learn about different types of disabilities and strategies for working with all kinds of learners in the classroom. They will experience what it is like to feel learning disabled and understand the difficulties these children have and how to help them to be more successful in school.



The Foundation Knowledge

All About our School

Understanding School Mission and

Goals: Participants will have an overview of LFDCS mission statement and goals while learning about our emergency protocol, services, programs and report completion.

Training will include: Code of Conduct, Discipline, Regulations, Behavior Management, Chain of Commands, and Interaction with Students.



SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Working in the classroom

Being in the classroom may be an overwhelming experience if substitute teachers are not well prepared. Participants will review the importance of following lesson plans as a continuance path for curriculum goals achievement and will learn strategies to stay focused and to keep students motivated and ready to learn.

We will explore alternatives for additional activities within the regular classroom curriculum.



L.F.D.C.S. is committed to a policy of equal opportunity for all students and employees

Get Involved now!

Strategies for Effective Instruction

Things to Keep in Mind

1. Model and suggest interesting, helpful, and respectful questions.
2. Keep the speaker focused and short.
3. Enforce classroom rules or make up your own rules such as; voice level, don't speak when a person is speaking...
4. Keep environment light for risk taking.

How Do You Motivate Students

- Morning meetings
- Putting down and reinforcing rules and logical consequences
- Classroom Organization
- Choices
- Assessment and reporting to teachers

Strategies for Motivating Students

The Five Principles of Motivating and Involving Students

CARES

Co-operation

Assertion

Responsibility

Empathy

Self-control

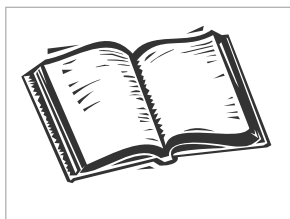
Engaging Parents: Practical Ideas from the Business World

MAT PILOTTE ♦ ATLANTIS CHARTER SCHOOL

MISSION OF THE SCHOOL

The mission of Atlantis Charter School is “to provide all children with an education that is second to none, so they can become adaptable and productive life-long learners.”

Practices That Support the Mission



FAMILY LEARNING CENTER

An integral component of the Atlantis Charter School is its Family Learning Center (FLC). The two full time FLC staff members work together with parents and staff to develop an annual plan of family services to be offered. The programs coordinated through the FLC include family oriented activities, fundraising, health, nutrition and litera-

cy, among others. The FLC also offers programs in collaboration with parents and several community organizations. The programs are designed based on parent feedback received through the Family Activities Survey, completed at the start of the school year and in collaboration with the teaching staff, the Health Office, administration and support staff.


The Director of the Family Learning Center is directly responsible for all issues related to the Family Learning Center, including student enrollment interviews, grant writing, preparation of appropriate State reports, supervision of special programs and events, parent volunteer program, community service projects, and development of family workshops. At Atlantis Charter School, the marriage of departmental collaboration and a sound marketing approach ensures a high level of parent involvement and a strong learning environment for Atlantis Charter School families.

Components of the Family Learning Center approach include:

- ♦ A safe, caring and welcoming environment that provides all students with a love for learning and strategies to teach how to resolve conflicts in a non-violent manner.
- ♦ A Home and School Compact that formalizes the involvement of school, parents and students, ensuring all parties participate in the delivery of educational services.
- ♦ A Family Learning Center that involves everyone in school—children, parents, teachers, and administrators—as partners in achieving success for our students.
- ♦ Administrators who ensure that staff has time to collaborate, share and plan together.

Observable Outcomes of the Practice



Atlantis Charter School assesses itself on the basis of Goals, Objectives and Performance measures for which quantifiable data is collected. Attached is an example of the Family Learning Center Performance measures for this year, with their results. 

Atlantis Charter School, working in collaboration with parents and caregivers, will maintain and expand the Family Learning Center to support student achievement and provide families with access to educational, health, and social services.

OBJECTIVE 1: All families at Atlantis Charter School will participate in their children's education.

ASSESSMENT:

- ❖ Percentage of parents signing the Home and School Involvement Compact.
- ❖ Attendance at Parent/Teacher Conferences.
- ❖ Attendance at activities and workshops sponsored by the FLC.
- ❖ Number of parents actively involved in the school's committees and parent groups.
- ❖ Number of parents who participate in service learning activities.
- ❖ Attendance at school sponsored extra-curricular activities.
- ❖ Number of parents who participate as members of the School Council.
- ❖ Number of parents who participated in interviews to hire new staff.

PROGRESS TOWARDS MEETING THE OBJECTIVE:

- ❖ 100% of ACS parents signed the 2002-2003 Home and School Involvement Compact.
- ❖ 100% of ACS parents attended the parent/teacher conferences.
- ❖ The School Council—with four parents and three students—met monthly throughout the year.
- ❖ Family Learning Center Committee—with two parents (30%)—also met monthly throughout the year.
- ❖ Assisted with the mobilization of our parent body towards the effort to defeat the Charter School Moratorium.
- ❖ Parents were members of the interview teams during the interviews to hire new faculty and staff.
- ❖ Offered several educational and enrichment workshops, including:
 - “Even Start Literacy Program” in collaboration with the YMCA
 - “I’m A Healthy Decision Maker” (Community Development & Recreation)
 - “Traffic & Safety Workshop” (2 part series with the FRPD)
 - “IDENT-A-KID Services of America”
 - “Taking Control: Financial Management” (The Speakers’ Bureau)
 - “Family Craft Nights” (Parent Coordinated)
 - “Let Sleep Work For You-MCAS testing and the importance of sleep”

- “Book Time With Ronald McDonald” (*Bump A Nose Productions*)
- “FOODPLAY” (*Health and Nutrition Series*)
- “Healthy Smiles Dental Program” (*HealthFirst Family Care Center*)
- “Creative Memories” (*Parent Coordinated*)

OBJECTIVE 2: The Family Learning Center will increase the scope and level of volunteer activities available to parents.

ASSESSMENT:

- ❖ Review of the volunteer database and parent sign-in logs to verify how many families performed a minimum of six hours of volunteer work per year.

PROGRESS TOWARDS MEETING THE OBJECTIVE:

- ❖ The database for monitoring volunteer participation was revised and is currently operational.
- ❖ The level of volunteer opportunities was stratified to accommodate the schedules of ACS families.
- ❖ Families performed at least six hours of volunteer work at the school. Others, whose schedules did not permit it, baked items for various school events and pursued donation opportunities.

OBJECTIVE 3: The Family Learning Center will develop and implement the School/Community Service Learning Program.

ASSESSMENT:

- ❖ The number of community service partnerships established.
- ❖ The number of parents and students actively participating in the projects as evidenced by the sign-in logs.

PROGRESS TOWARDS MEETING THE OBJECTIVE:

- ❖ Students and parents participated in a great number of community service activities, among which were the following:
 - “Make a Difference Day” *Atlantis Charter School Salutes Our Heroes*
 - *Food Drive for Citizens for Citizens Food Pantry*
 - *Alan Shawn Feinstein National Food Drive Challenge*
 - *Box Tops for Education*
 - *Card making for police officers, firefighters and overseas troops.*
- ❖ Established and maintained community partnerships including:
 - *Even Start*
 - *The Trustees of Reservations (Bioreserve Project)*
 - *The Fall River Homeless Coalition*
 - *Fall River Public Access Television*
 - *Carousel Family Fun Center*

OBJECTIVE 4: The ACS Family Learning Center will provide events that create a cohesive relationship among students, families and faculty members.

ASSESSMENT:

- ❖ Number of events presented.
- ❖ Number of parents who attend the parenting education programs.
- ❖ Workshop evaluations.

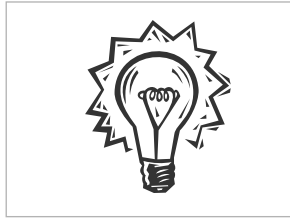
PROGRESS TOWARDS MEETING THE OBJECTIVE:

- ❖ The Family Learning Center works to develop and present a series of appropriate and timely events that foster a community environment among the Atlantis Charter School family.
 - *Holiday Craft Fair*
 - *Harvest Dance*
 - *Providence Bruins Night*
 - *Beauty and the Beast*
 - *Book Bingo and Holiday Cookie Swap*
 - *Student and Staff Talent Show*
 - *Spring Fever Dance*
 - *Spring Health and Craft Fair*

Atlantis Charter School recently made a connection with an organization called Off the Curb, which dedicates itself to building self esteem and confidence in young people through dance. During an 8-week after school program, Off the Curb works with students of Atlantis Charter School to teach various styles of dance and self expression while reinforcing their message. At the end of the program, students are invited to perform in a community presentation, represent their school and perform with a professional dance company.

- ❖ Excellent student performance.
- ❖ Students who display self-discipline and responsibility for their own actions and demonstrate an understanding of, and commitment to, civic responsibility.
- ❖ Established community resources and partnerships.
- ❖ Increased level of volunteer activities and parent involvement. Work cooperatively with all staff members and families to provide educational and enrichment programs and workshops.
- ❖ Strong involvement in the School/Community Service Learning Program helps our students understand the importance of helping others in their community who are less fortunate.

TIPS: Advice to Other Schools for Implementing this Type of Practice



- ❖ Recruit and retain talented and highly dedicated faculty and staff.
- ❖ Know your families by increasing your visibility/availability at events, programs, workshops, the media, open house events, parent groups, involvement with committees, etc.
- ❖ Create a welcoming environment (serving food at events always helps).
- ❖ Know your community resources and organizations by joining community committees. Further information, specific to your community, can be obtained through your Chamber of Commerce (which may also have an education committee).
- ❖ Add “Marketing” to your job description. Sometimes the idea of parent involvement needs to be sold.

Mat Pilotte came to Atlantis Charter School from previous careers in health care and business. His Principal observed that in Mat, “I think we’ve struck gold,” when he took on his role as Director of the Family Learning Center.



August 8, 2003

Dear Families and Friends,

Welcome back!!

I am honored to be a part of The Atlantis Charter School family and community as Director of the Family Learning Center. First, I would like to congratulate grades 5-8 for being the pioneers of our new Upper School. I look forward to exploring new opportunities with our returning and incoming students, families and faculty.

Two big changes will take place with the Family Learning Center this year:

1. The Family Learning Center will be located at the Upper School. A large hall located in the basement - and with direct entrance from the parking lot - will be available for family/parent activities, meetings, etc. We will have three computers for your use. All computers have Internet access as well as Microsoft Office and some of the software that your children use during the regular school. You may choose to visit the FLC to write or update your resume, search for jobs on-line, etc. Tell us what your needs are and we will do our best to assist you in meeting those needs.
2. My office and the office of a yet to be hired assistant will be located within this same area. This will allow two staff members to be available to assist you, answer your questions, set up your required volunteer times, etc.

The Family Learning Center will be calling on parents and families to strengthen our parent group. This year, the parent group will consist of several committees to share ideas and execute plans that will expand upon the many services Atlantis Charter School has to offer. Meetings will be held monthly. The opportunities to become involved are diverse and I encourage all Atlantis family members to participate in the various activities and events that will be scheduled throughout the coming year (please refer to our updated Interest Inventory form for more details).

Please feel free to contact me anytime during school hours and, for the convenience of working parents, evening appointments will also be available.

Warmest regards,

Mathieu J. Pilotte, Director
Family Learning Center



Mathieu Pilotte, Director
 Family Learning Center
 Atlantis Charter School
Family Learning Center Interest Inventory

Dear Parents/Guardians,

The Family Learning Center strives to provide quality programs and workshops of interest to you and your family. Please have your child return this inventory to his or her teacher. We welcome any other suggestions for activities and there is a space for them at the bottom of this page. We thank you for taking the time to complete this form.

Parent's/Guardian's Name(s) _____

Child's Name _____ Grade _____ Teacher _____

The **best time** for me to attend a school-sponsored program is... *(Check all that apply)*

Mornings _____ Early Afternoon _____ Immediately After School _____ Early evening _____

The **best day** for me is... *(Check all that apply)*

Monday _____ Tuesday _____ Wednesday _____ Thursday _____ Friday _____ Saturday _____

Please check off all topics that may be of interest to you.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> How Do I Help My Child With Homework | <input type="checkbox"/> Helping Preschoolers Get a Head Start |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Money Management | <input type="checkbox"/> How to Talk So Your Kids Will Listen |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parent Group | <input type="checkbox"/> Stress Management |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Discipline with Love and Logic | <input type="checkbox"/> Sibling Without Rivalry |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Swing Dancing | <input type="checkbox"/> Drug and Alcohol Awareness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Arts and Crafts Classes | <input type="checkbox"/> Wellness Programs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> First Aid | <input type="checkbox"/> Safety at Home, in School, and in the Community |
| <input type="checkbox"/> GED Classes | <input type="checkbox"/> Computer Literacy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cooking Classes | <input type="checkbox"/> Hand-on-Science |
| <input type="checkbox"/> How to Enhance your Child's Reading Ability | <input type="checkbox"/> Foreign Language Classes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family Science Night | <input type="checkbox"/> Classroom Representatives |
| <input type="checkbox"/> CPR Classes | <input type="checkbox"/> Family MCAS Camp |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parents on Board (How to enhance your child's success in school.) | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Strategies for children with ADHD and Learning Disabilities | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dealing with Divorce and Changing Families | |
| Other Suggestions? _____ | |

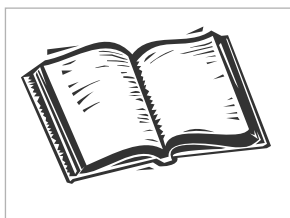
Language and Culture: Multi-Cultural Challenges & Opportunities

PAM KILLILEA & ROSA PAYES ♦ LOWELL COMMUNITY CHARTER SCHOOL

MISSION OF THE SCHOOL

The mission of the Lowell Community Charter School (LCCS) is to prepare children for success as students, citizens, and workers by providing a supportive, challenging, multicultural learning environment that integrates the strengths of Lowell's diverse communities and cultures. LCCS promotes high academic achievement in each of the areas addressed by the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks—including English; reading & language arts; writing; mathematics; science; health & fitness; world languages; art; and music—as well as character and ethics. The school also places special emphasis on the contributions that immigrants have made to the American society and on the culture, language, and history of the Southeast Asian and Latino peoples who comprise a substantial portion of Lowell's present day population. LCCS actively promotes the joy of discovery and creativity in the learning process, and integrates the use of technology into aspects of instruction. Learning is further enhanced through a longer school day and an extended year.

Practices That Support the Mission



Intensive, focused efforts to teach basic skills (with the goal of all students reading at or above grade level by 3rd grade) and encourage early learning by supporting both students and parents. LCCS uses techniques developed by The Success for All Foundation® of Baltimore, MD. The material presented here illustrates several Success for All® principles: how the Success for All® Facilitator (Pam Killilea) and staff reach out individually to parents to bring them into the educational process, how family members become Volunteer Readers and Volunteer Listeners for other children, and how the Family Support Team uses a strengths-based approach in handling issues in the classroom. More information about Success for All® can be found on their website at www.successforall.net.

OUTREACH TO INDIVIDUAL FAMILIES (Second Cup of Coffee)

Second Cup of Coffee evolved as a way to encourage parents who dropped off their children off each morning to begin to know the school and staff better. At LCCS we schedule this once a month. We have shown appreciation in a variety of ways. We have passed out school magnets, school pins (created by a student), a cup of coffee, school pencils and many other creative ideas that show our appreciation to parents.

In starting Second Cup of Coffee there are a few things that we recommend. First, establish a team that is available once a month. You may choose to do this on a rotating basis, however having this team in place will help in the planning for the year. Second, chose the ways you would like to show appreciation. At LCCS we meet during the summer to plan the activities and dates. It is a nice time to get together and plan for a positive start to the upcoming school year. Third, enjoy yourself. Meeting parents is an essential part in the success of any school. Please keep in mind that you may need to chase cars down the street in the beginning because parents are unsure of this type of positive approach. The results of your efforts will ensure the parental involvement that each school desires.


VOLUNTEER READING PROGRAM

A component of Success For All ® is that all students are required to read for a minimum of 20 minutes night. This is monitored by homeroom teachers and reported back to the reading facilitator. The information is then reviewed and students are identified if they are in need of a volunteer reader. Some reasons they may not be reading is because of language issues at home or literacy levels of parents. In order to ensure that all students are reading, we have parents that volunteer their time to read with certain students.

If students are not reading at home it puts them at a significant disadvantage. The more exposure a child has to literature, the more prepared they will be for higher grades. A student relies on their parents to expose them to a variety of experiences and different types of literature. If a parent cannot provide these experiences for their child, we feel it is our responsibility to fill that void. One parent that has been a positive role model for these students has been involved in our Volunteer Reading Program since September. She has given numerous students the experiences needed to be successful readers. She comes to school every morning @ 7:30 and reads with a group of 4-6 students. As she spends time with alternating students, the other children are reading to each other. The students are receiving experiences that they would otherwise not have. When students read to each other they work on specific skills that they are taught in reading class. This parent has a solid knowledge of our reading program and relays those skills to the children she works with. It is this commitment that makes LCCS a unique experience.

It is another goal that we have a minimum of twenty volunteer readers throughout the school year. In talking with this parent, she has noted the remarkable progress that she has seen over the last few months. She has seen how Success For All ® has worked with her group as well as her own child. Students are taught strategies to become independent, critical thinkers. These strategies are implemented and modeled by teachers and parents. It is because of this commitment by parents that help make our school a success.

FAMILY SUPPORT PROCESS

The Success For All[®] program has found that the partnership of the Reading Program and the Family Support Program has proven effective in achieving significant reductions in the numbers of referrals to Special Education, especially in the category of learning disabilities. The Family Support team meets on a weekly basis to assess individual students and to develop intervention plans to increase student achievement. All referrals submitted to the Family Support Team are assessed, a plan of action is developed and implemented, and the plan is reviewed in a timely manner until the problems are resolved. Please see the attached Solution Sheet  to review the areas that are covered during the meeting. Also, a more detailed explanation of the process can be found at www.SuccessforAll.net. The meeting takes approximately 30 minutes and involves the Family Support Team and the parent(s). Parent(s) are a critical component of the meeting and need to be present to ensure that the goal of the meeting is supported at home.

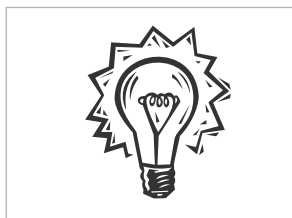
Observable Outcomes of the Practice



As I speak to reading teachers that have students in the Volunteer Reading Program, the success of the program is remarkable. Teachers have noted that the difference in their students reading abilities is commendable. Students are more confident in their approach to reading. ESL students are more comfortable in reading stories and are able to ask questions in a small group setting. The individualized

attention they receive is an invaluable component of the program.

TIPS: *Advice to Other Schools for Implementing this Type of Practice*



- ❖ Establish a team with a designated leader to implement and evaluate each component.
- ❖ Schedule periodic check-ins to allow opportunity for feedback and evaluation.
- ❖ Implement all components consistently. Follow through is imperative to ensure the success of student progress.

Pam Killilea has been at the Lowell Community Charter School since it's opening in August 2000. Pam began as a Kindergarten Teacher and has since moved into the Success for All[®] Reading Facilitator position. Pam ensures that the reading program is in full implementation. She is also responsible for the tutoring program, Family Support component and managing the Reading First Grant.

Rosa Payes is the parent of three beautiful girls ranging in ages from 6-10 years old. Two of her daughters attend the Lowell Community Charter School. Rosa got involved with the Lowell Community Charter School as a parent and for two years was President of the Parent Advisory Board. Presently, Rosa works for LCCS as the Office Manager and an active parent. She is also one of the translators at the school. She translates for parents at Family Support Meetings, Parent Teacher Conferences, and daily interactions with families.

Lowell Community Charter School **Family Support Referral**

Student Name _____ Grade _____ Date _____

Referring Staff Person _____

Primary Parent/Guardian Contact: _____ Current Phone # _____

Primary Concern(s): ☐ Academic ☐ Behavioral ☐ Both

Student's Strengths:

State Reason(s) for Referral:

List Interventions/Strategies Attempted:

Successful?

_____	YES	SOMEWHAT	NO
_____	YES	SOMEWHAT	NO
_____	YES	SOMEWHAT	NO
_____	YES	SOMEWHAT	NO
_____	YES	SOMEWHAT	NO
_____	YES	SOMEWHAT	NO
_____	YES	SOMEWHAT	NO
_____	YES	SOMEWHAT	NO

Reading – Rate performance: ☐ Far below grade level ☐ Somewhat below grade level ☐ At grade level
☐ Somewhat above grade level ☐ Far above grade level

Provide Narrative Statement to Support Rating in Reading:

Writing – Rate performance: ☐ Far below grade level ☐ Somewhat below grade level ☐ At grade level
☐ Somewhat above grade level ☐ Far above grade level

Provide Narrative Statement to Support Rating in Reading:

Math – Rate performance: ☐ Far below grade level ☐ Somewhat below grade level ☐ At grade level
☐ Somewhat above grade level ☐ Far above grade level

Provide Narrative Statement to Support Rating in Reading:

List Overall Work Habits / Classroom Behavior / Social Skills:

Date Rec'd _____ Observation Date _____ Case Manager _____

Date _____

SOLUTION SHEET

[illegible][illegible][illegible][illegible]

Review Date_____



VOLUNTEER LISTENER PROGRAM

by Family Support Teams of
City Springs Elementary School
and Harriet Tubman Elementary School
Baltimore City, Maryland

The **Volunteer Listener Program** is an excellent way to highlight reading for parents children, and communities. The purpose of the program is to give children additional opportunities to read and more chances to feel good about the progress they are making. In addition, it allows parents and community members to reinforce the importance of reading to children. The volunteer's job is **listen to a student read** and then **shower the child with praise** both for effort and progress. Since this is not a tutoring program, the reading level of the parent is not important. Any interested parent or community member is encouraged to participate. Volunteers and children have been very enthusiastic about this program.

There are generally two ways that schools have implemented Volunteer Listener Programs:



- **Volunteer listeners can be paired with a specific child** and the parent will listen to this child each week. This is generally used for children who need some extra practice or attention in reading. For this approach to work well, there must be a dedicated parent or community member who is willing to make a firm weekly commitment to listen to his student. It is also crucial that the parent remains positive. This should be a relaxed and enjoyable experience in reading.
- A second way to implement the volunteer listener project is make it a **school-wide reading incentive program**. Children can earn **Reader Awards** from the teacher for progress in reading. On the Reader Award, the teacher records a good time during the day for the child to read to a parent. The awards are placed in a centrally-located volunteer listener box. Whenever a volunteer listener enters the building, he or she can pick one or two reader awards and listen to several children read. After the child has read to the volunteer listener, the volunteer signs the reading award and the child returns the award to the teacher. This allows the teacher to keep track of how often children are having parents listen to them. Although the award is usually given for progress, children in need of extra practice can be given awards for fairly small reading gains. This second organizational method has the advantage of being easy for parents to do. Volunteer listeners do not have to commit to a specific schedule. Additionally, this is a positive, proactive approach to reading that targets the whole school.

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VOLUNTEER LISTENERS PROGRAM GUIDELINES



1. Make sure that you **sign in** when you come to the classroom.

2. Each child should have reading material **ready**.

3. If materials seems too difficult for the child, **let the teacher know**.

4. **Please come regularly**. Children come to like and depend on their volunteer listeners. Regular attendance ensures better academic success as well as increased motivation for students.



5. Even if a child is having difficulty, **stay positive**. If a child is struggling with a word, provide him/her the word and move on. Sometimes if a child is able to get even the first sound in the word, that is real progress. Comment on progress as well as perfection. Volunteer listener time is designed to provide practice and motivation. Staying positive is the best approach.



6. Volunteer listeners contribute their time. Please **avoid buying things** for your students. Your time and enthusiasm are enough.



7. Sometimes a student may tell you something about his/her family, or you may know the family from the community. It is important that you keep any information about the child **confidential**. Do not discuss the progress of the child or share information about the student with others. If you have particular concerns about a student, please talk to a member of the Family Support Team.



8. **Keep it fun**. Volunteer listeners are **not** tutors. The job of a listener is to listen and give a child a sense of accomplishment. As long as the child feels good about whatever he has done, you have been successful.

VOLUNTEER LISTENER PROGRAM



Children learn to read by reading. They do not become good readers unless they spend a lot of time reading books. As a part of participating in *Success for All*, our school is looking for ways to give students many opportunities to read and more chances to feel good about the progress that they are making. The Volunteer Listener program is designed to meet both of those objectives.

Our school is looking for parents and school personnel who would be willing to volunteer some time to listen to students read. The only criteria for participating in this program is to have good ears and the enthusiasm to encourage a child to keep reading. Volunteer Listeners come to school at least once a week and listen. Students who are making progress in reading can celebrate their success by reading to a Volunteer Listener. This is a very important program which helps generate enthusiasm for reading and bolsters the reading levels of many of our students.

The more participation we have, the better our students will be at reading. If you have any time to spare, a few minutes first thing in the morning or at any time during the day, please sign this form and agree to participate. If you have any questions about this program, please do not hesitate to call me.

Sincerely,



I am interested in becoming a Volunteer Listener.

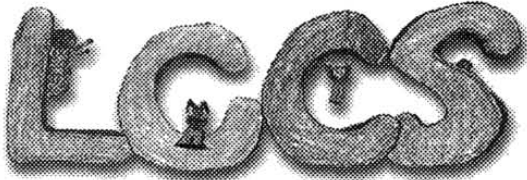
Yes

No

Name

Phone

Address



LOWELL COMMUNITY CHARTER SCHOOL
Uniting Voices, Connecting Communities

Kindergarten Reading Bookmark

Name _____

week of _____

PARENTS: Children are required to read at home each night for **at least twenty minutes** to reinforce reading skills taught in class. We encourage you to read with them, ask them questions, and discuss the stories. **Please sign and return this form each day to your child's teacher.**

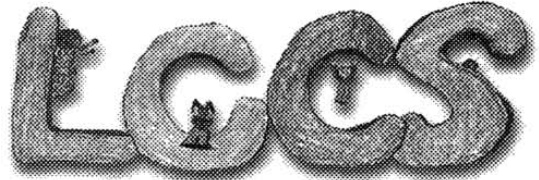
THEMES:

Monday - Read a book together

Tuesday - Take turns reading the pages of a book.

Wednesday - Read a story and then write or draw about what you have read.

Thursday - Encourage your child to read the book to another person.



LOWELL COMMUNITY CHARTER SCHOOL
Uniting Voices, Connecting Communities

Kindergarten Reading Bookmark

Name _____

week of _____

PARENTS: Children are required to read at home each night for **at least twenty minutes** to reinforce reading skills taught in class. We encourage you to read with them, ask them questions, and discuss the stories. **Please sign and return this form each day to your child's teacher.**

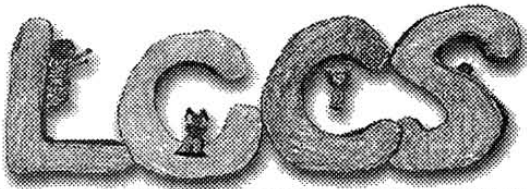
THEMES:

Monday - Read a book together

Tuesday - Take turns reading the pages of a book.

Wednesday - Read a story and then write or draw about what you have read.

Thursday - Encourage your child to read the book to another person.



LOWELL COMMUNITY CHARTER SCHOOL

Uniting Voices, Connecting Communities

WINGS Reading Bookmark

Name _____

week of _____

PARENTS: Children are required to read at home each night for **at least twenty minutes** to reinforce reading skills taught in class. We encourage you to read with them, ask them questions, and discuss the stories. In addition, students need to complete the writing responses on the back of this sheet. **Please sign and return this form each day to the homebase teacher.**

Day 1 _____

Day 2 _____

Day 3 _____

Day 4 _____

Day 5 _____

(optional)

PARENTS: Please have your child complete the writing assignment on the back of this bookmark for each day. For example, on Day One, your child should complete the writing assignment for Day One on the back of this bookmark.

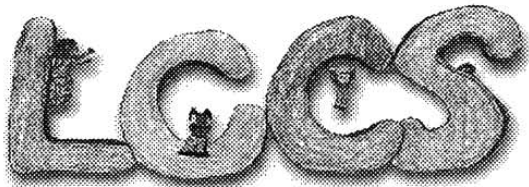
Read and Respond

Day 1. Write one **fact** about the story. _____

Day 2. Make a **prediction** about the story. _____

Day 3. Write an **opinion** about the story. _____

Day 4. Arrange three (3) **events** from the story in sequential order _____



LOWELL COMMUNITY CHARTER SCHOOL

Uniting Voices. Connecting Communities

ROOTS Reading Bookmark

Name _____

week of _____

PARENTS: Children are required to read at home each night for **at least twenty minutes** to reinforce reading skills taught in class. We encourage you to read with them, ask them questions, and discuss the stories. In addition, students need to complete the writing responses on the back of this sheet. **Please sign and return this form each day to the homebase teacher.**

Day 1 _____

Day 2 _____

Day 3 _____

Day 4 _____

Day 5 _____

(optional)

PARENTS: Please have your child complete the writing assignment on the back of this bookmark for each day. For example, on Day One, your child should complete the writing assignment for Day One on the back of this bookmark.

Read and Respond

Day 1. Write two unfamiliar words from the story. _____

Day 2. Make a prediction about the story. _____

Day 3. Name a character from the story and one word to describe him/her. _____

Day 4. Write the name of the title and author of the story. _____

The Family Learning Contract: A Tool to Support Parent Volunteerism & Parent Accountability

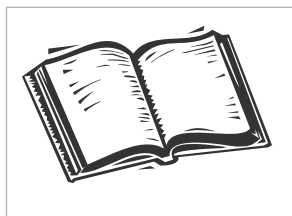
FELICIA SMITH & CHRISTINE HARDMON • NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSE CHARTER SCHOOL

MISSION OF THE SCHOOL



The mission of the Neighborhood House Charter School is to offer a quality education to a diverse community of Boston children through a neighborhood based school that integrates education with social services and health care programs for the benefit of students and families with otherwise limited educational opportunities.

In pursuing this mission, the NHCS commits to developing innovative practices and sharing these with other public schools to improve public education for all students.

Practices That Support the Mission



FAMILY LEARNING CONTRACT

The school supports a strong partnership between home and school and encourages parent involvement. NHCS uses a Family Learning Contract,  a contract which outlines the requirements for students to be successful at NHCS and also holds parents accountable. In 2002, a consultant was hired to give the school feedback on parent volunteerism. The purpose of the survey was to learn ways in which the school could better meet the need of parents, with a particular emphasis on how parents would like to be involved with school. From the findings we developed and implemented a revised Family Learning Contract  which we now feel is a more enforceable document. The new Family Learning Contract is a tool enabling the school to focus more on community building through parent volunteerism along with the clear expectations of parents.

The Family Services Coordinator is now able to present clear consequences if parents do not adhere to the Family Learning Contract, which requires parents to volunteer among other things.

“Non-compliance with this contract may result in a meeting with the Headmaster to determine the appropriateness of your child’s placement at NHCS. Failure to comply may also impact eligibility or other financial assistance available through NHCS.”

Observable Outcomes of the Practice

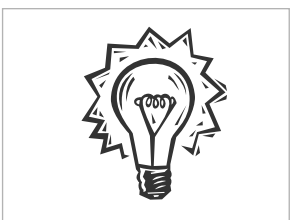


Last year was the first year we tracked the information and this year we are making it a priority to increase parent involvement.

However, we have seen that families are more likely to get involved if they have a clear idea of the expectations and if they are approached individually. Parents are now aware of


how many hours they are required to fulfill and the various ways to volunteer. They have a general sense of this information by the start of school. Not only are parents aware of ways they can volunteer but teachers are more aware of ways to utilize parents. This year there is so much more excitement around parent volunteerism. Parents are calling and informing teachers and staff the days they are available to volunteer and are actually looking forward to volunteering. They are coming up with suggestions and ways they can actually get involved. Since the Family Learning Contract has been revised, parents have actually commented that they didn't know there were so many ways to get involved. Some parents thought they were just needed for bake sales and chaperoning trips. Parents enjoy having the option of volunteering outside of their child's classroom. One of the many great benefits of being an involved parent is the fact that your child expects you to get involved and revels at the possibility of seeing and knowing mommy or daddy is an involved parent at his/her school and other students start to expect the same from their parents.

TIPS: Advice to Other Schools for Implementing this Type of Practice



- ❖ Have a contact person who is easily accessible, someone other than the classroom teacher. Parents should feel comfortable approaching this person for ideas and suggestions on ways to volunteer. The contact person should be in charge of collecting the information and keeping track of the volunteer hours, which requires periodic check-ins with classroom teachers through out

the school year. This person's office should also be easily accessible. It should be near a high traffic area, where parents pick-up or drop off students, close to the entrance of the school.

- ❖ Have a ready list of ideas for parents to volunteer.  This list should include committees, suggestions and leave room for ideas. Parents should pick from this list and return it to the classroom teacher. It is important that a copy of the form is given back to the parent (just as a reminder).
- ❖ It is also important to talk to staff and teachers about ways they can utilize parent volunteers and encourage them to approach parents individually (face- to- face contact, email, telephone calls or notices individually addressed, etc.) instead of sending home general information requesting parent volunteers.
- ❖ Through out the school year parents should be reminded to volunteer. It should be announced at school-wide events and should also come from classroom teachers and administration.

- ❖ Acknowledgement of parents that have volunteered-certificates, names printed in school newspaper or displayed through-out the school.
- ❖ It should be stated clearly *why* it is important to volunteer. Research shows that when parents are involved children do better in school.

Felicia Smith has worked at the Neighborhood House Charter School for the past four years as the Family Services Coordinator. Her primary role is to increase parental involvement and act as a liaison/mediator for parents. Felicia manages the Parent Center which is a resource room for parents. Among her many duties, she manages the recruitment and outreach for NHCS, which has over 1900 students awaiting enrollment. She attends monthly Parent Council Gatherings and is a member of Math Task Force and Student Support Team. She organized and created, several annual family and school-wide events such as Family Night at the Fleet Center, Coffee Hour with the Headmaster and the End of the Year BBQ to name a few.

Christine Hardmon is one of many involved parents at NHCS. This is her second year as a parent at NHCS. She has a son in the 2nd grade and is looking forward to many involved years as a NHCS parent. She fully understands in order for her child to be successful and succeed she must be an involved parent, which is why she volunteered to be co-chair of the Parent Council.

**NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSE CHARTER SCHOOL (OLD FAMILY LEARNING
CONTRACT)**

At the NHCS, learning is a family activity. Every child learns best when his or her family is actively involved in the child's education. By choosing to send your child/ren to the NHCS, you have chosen to be an active participant in your child's life at the school. The NHCS Family Learning Contract spells out what each family is required to do to help their child succeed anywhere when they leave the NHCS. Please read all requirements, initial the space before each one, sign the bottom and return it to the school by July 31, 2001.

If you or your child cannot adhere to these basic requirements, a conference with the Headmaster will help determine if the NHCS is the proper school environment for your family.

(Please have each parent/guardian initial each one and sign at the bottom):

Your Child/ren's
names: _____

_____ I/We will fill out emergency information, medical information and the Family Learning Contract and return them to the school by July 31, 2001. I understand that my child will not be allowed to start school until these forms are in. To maximize communication and ensure parental contact in the event of a medical emergency, if any of this information changes during the year, such as my address and phone number, I will notify the school immediately.

_____ I/We will attend three parent/teacher conferences to develop my child/ren's Individualized Learning Plan and discuss his/her progress and goals.

_____ August 2001	Initial Assessment / Introductory Meeting
_____ October 2001	Goal Setting Conference / Portfolio Review
_____ March 2002	Goal Setting Conference / Portfolio Review

_____ I/We have read the School Handbook and will support all policies and follow the procedures contained in it.
(PLEASE CONTINUE ON OTHER SIDE)

_____ I/We will complete at least 5 hours of volunteer service at the school, either by assisting in the classroom, chaperoning a field trip, serving on a special committee, helping at an event, or attending a work day at the school.

_____ I/We will provide a quiet, clear, well-lit workspace for my child/ren to do homework.

_____ I/We will check my child's homework nightly and sign it. If my child is unable to complete her/his homework or meet the specific requirements of the teacher, I will send a note to the teacher explaining the circumstances.

_____ I/We will attend two Academic Meetings the school will organize during the year.

_____ I/We will respond promptly to school communications, including permission slips, surveys, phone messages, etc.

I/We, (print name/s)

agree to fulfill these basic requirements during the year 2001/2002 at the NHCS. I/We understand that by fulfilling these requirements, I/we are helping our child/ren succeed at school.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSE CHARTER SCHOOL FAMILY LEARNING CONTRACT (Revised)

At NHCS, we strongly believe that there needs to be a strong partnership between home and school to educate our children. By choosing to send your child to NHCS, you have decided to be an active participant in your child's education. Therefore, we have outlined the *requirements* for your child to attend the Neighborhood House Charter School and be a successful student.

This is an agreement between the family of *(child's name)* _____ and Neighborhood House Charter. This agreement is in effect for the academic school year of _____. By signing the Family Learning Contract you agree to adhere to the following:

Each family will:

- ✓ Attend all academic meetings to discuss your child's progress and goals.
- ✓ Notify the main office immediately (within 24 hours) if the phone number or address changes and provide up to date emergency and medical information.
- ✓ Read the school handbook and abide by the policies and guidelines set forth.
- ✓ Complete at least 5 hours of volunteer service at the school.

Please see the attached forms for ways to volunteer.

- ✓ Stay informed and up to date about events and issues at school by reading notices, newsletters, emails, posted announcements and checking in periodically with staff.
- ✓ Respond promptly (within 2 school days) to school communications, including permission slips, email, phone messages, etc.
- ✓ Support your child at home to ensure his/her needs are met in school by arriving on time, completing homework assignments on time, completing home reading, and following the recommendations of the classroom teachers/advisors.
- ✓

By signing this contract I fully agree with the terms outlined. I furthermore, understand that by fulfilling these requirements I am helping my child succeed at the Neighborhood House Charter School.

Non-compliance with this contract may result in a meeting with the Headmaster to determine the appropriateness of your child's placement at NHCS. Failure to comply may also impact eligibility for scholarships or other financial assistance available through NHCS.

Signature _____ Date _____

"It's backed by 30 years of research. When families are involved, children do better in school. The schools do better too."

Parents are Powerful, Center for Law and Education

NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSE CHARTER SCHOOL



VOLUNTEER RESOURCE FORM

Name (Parent or Guardian) _____

Child/ren Name and Grade _____

Home Phone Number _____

Email Address _____

Best Way to Get in Contact With You _____

I prefer to volunteer on _____
(day of the week / or no preference)

I prefer to volunteer in the _____
(morning, afternoon, or evening / or no preference)

Ways to Volunteer (Have Fun)

Join a Committee

- _____ **School Site Council** (attend monthly evening meetings, review school policies, and work closely with other council representatives – Headmaster, 2 teachers, 3 parents)
- _____ **Parent Council Chairs & Officers** (attend monthly evening meetings, set the agenda and facilitate meetings, assist organizing school-wide events, work closely with the Family Services Coordinator and other Parent Council leaders)
- _____ **New Parent Welcoming Committee** (develop outreach activities and events to welcome new parents to the school through phone calls and other forms of outreach)
- _____ **Parent Fundraising Committee** (organize and coordinate several fundraising events, work closely with the Parent Council Board)
- _____ **Special Education Advisory Committee** (work closely with the Special Ed. Coordinator to review laws and services for special needs students)
- _____ **Political Action Committee** (write letters, make phone calls to state representatives, lobby, and work closely with Headmaster as needed)
- _____ **8th Grade Graduation Committee** (assist in preparing and organizing the 8th grade Graduation, help with fundraising for the 8th grade class trip, work closely with the Dean of Middle School)

Classroom Help

- ___ **Chaperone** field trips and other events
- ___ **Assist with smaller fundraisers for classrooms** (bake sales, school store)
- ___ **Volunteer in the classroom** (as needed by your child's classroom teacher)

Administrative Support

- ___ **Front Desk coverage** (answer the door and phone, photo-copy notices or flyers, other light administrative work)
- ___ **Parent listserv** (manage the school's listserv, add new parents, collect and disseminate information to parents using the school listserv)
- ___ **High School Placement Volunteer** (assist in organizing alumni events, making phone calls, and light paper work)

Other Ways to Be Involved & Have Fun

- ___ **Help plan and assist with a specific school-wide event** (e.g. Mega Math Mania, end of the year Family Barbecue, etc) (set up chairs & tables, decorate, disseminate information, provide food & beverages, etc)
- ___ **Assist with the Winter Arts Night or Spring Arts Concert** (assist arts staff in coordinating those events)
- ___ **Book Fair** (assist librarian in coordinating spring book fair)
- ___ **Room Parent List** (be a parent contact for your child's class or advisory, make phone calls to a designated list of parents about upcoming events)



___ **Call me! You never know what I might be able to do.**

Students are our greatest assets and parents are our greatest resources. If you have any talents or special interests and would like to volunteer your services please state what they are. Thank you!

Planning the Action

GO TO THE PEOPLE
LIVE AMONG THEM
LEARN FROM THEM
LOVE THEM
START WITH WHAT THEY KNOW
BUILD FROM WHAT THEY HAVE
BUT OF THE BEST LEADERS
WHEN THE TASK IS ACCOMPLISHED
THEIR WORK IS DONE
THE PEOPLE REMARK
WE HAVE DONE IT OURSELVES.

-OLD CHINESE PROVERB

What is Action Planning?

Action Planning is a set of steps by which individuals or groups can structure a project or innovation that they wish to implement. It is a way to think about what they want to accomplish and what is needed to get there. There are many models of Action Planning and Action Research available in the worlds of education, business, management and consulting, including a comprehensive model for the education world described by Joyce Epstein and others in *School, Family and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action* (2). Anyone who wishes to make change needs to have an Action Plan from which to work and from which to review and modify their approach.

Joyce Epstein, et al. in *School, Family and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action* (2) points to some areas of research that have shown how important partnering is to children's academic functioning. As a central tenet of school achievement, students need "multiple sources of support" in order to succeed. Bringing parents into this environment is not so obvious or easy. In addition, Epstein notes that teachers and administrators are often resistant to increasing parent involvement and since parents vary in how much they are initially involved, they must actively reach out in order to involve all families.

We have seen in our own charter school communities that parent involvement, although often mandated, can vary greatly depending on factors related both to what the parents bring and how the school staff and leaders relate to their communities. Especially in immigrant communities, outreach activities must be tailored to the

strengths and interests of parents and appropriate to their cultures or families will not respond. In short, as Epstein puts it "programs will be most useful to schools and to families if they are customized, comprehensive, and continually improved to help meet important goals for students." (2, p. 162)

In Epstein's model it is suggested that each school organize and support an "Action Team for Partnerships." This is a group composed of a variety of participants (she suggests 6-12), chosen for their energy and diversity, from the school and the wider community who can commit themselves to addressing the needs and goals of the school and the students. This group is the central planning and organizing body that sets innovations in motion, can recruit help when necessary and is responsible for evaluating, adapting and re-evaluating decisions and activities. Students are included in the Action Team at the high school level. An Action Team such as Epstein describes is comparable to a stakeholder group in a business or non-profit environment and is most effective when it contains all voices with an interest in student success.

LEVELS OF ACTION RESEARCH

One component of Action Research that is prominent in the business community and in Epstein's model is the necessity to evaluate a practice once it is in place with the understanding that steps that are taken may *seem* right but will always need to be tailored to a particular environment, community or situation. Once a practice is chosen and begun, the team that has been responsible for it must then decide whether it has been effective. To do this, some evidence must be gathered, either in

“ Anyone who wishes to make change needs to have an Action Plan from which to work and from which to review and modify their approach. ”

the form of data or other feedback. If the practice has been successful, it needs to be integrated into the rest of the system. If it is judged to have not been successful, it needs to be re-evaluated and steps taken to change or reject the process. The team needs to be able to reflect on its own activity and take appropriate next steps.

Action Planning or Action Research is an on-going, cyclical process that takes the commitment of a team of participants who are able to work in a collaborative, respectful manner over time. Epstein's book has a wide variety of exercises, evaluation forms, timetables and other wonderful suggestions for developing appropriate Action Teams, conducting workshops to build team spirit and team skills and many, many suggestions for practice innovations.

OUR ACTION PLANNING MODEL

The Project for School Innovation

At our conference on October 1, 2003, the Action Planning model that was used was presented by one of the “Many Faces of Parent Involvement” project partners, Michael Rothman of the Project for School Innovation. The Project for School Innovation has used its model over several years to bring together schools wishing to create program innovations and help them tease apart, then put back together how they accomplished their goals in order to help other schools replicate successful practices. Through its Educators Sharing Success program, PSI has supported this process and has published related books on subjects such as character education, “KidLab,” a science education practice, individualized student assessment techniques, inclusion and others.

As the last activity at our “Many Faces” conference, Michael Rothman, the Director of PSI, walked participants through their own Action Planning process. The project was fortunate to have the support of this dynamic presenter in order to help conference attendees take the practices learned that day and translate them into individualized approaches and activities to develop at their schools.

Action Plan Guide

On the next pages you will find a version of the Project for School Innovation's Action Planning Guide. The descriptions of the steps and activities are fairly clear and should make sense in most environments. A few comments are in order, however:

1. The steps spelled out in this Action Plan Guide should be taken seriously. In the initial stages of planning, merely fulfilling the activities listed in these steps can help to determine whether an idea is doable or to point out what preliminary actions need to take place before it is.
2. PSI refers to a "team" in discussing these Action Planning steps. While PSI is not referring specifically to the Joyce Epstein "Action Team" model, the formation of a team effort is still important. It is very difficult to implement a new practice with just one or two people who think it is a good idea. At the very least, support is needed from an administrative perspective, as well as in thinking through the implications of a practice. Deciding on the membership of the team is an important preliminary step. In addition, working from a team spreads out the responsibility for accomplishing the goal, rather than success or failure falling on one or two "super-people."
3. All of the material used by the Project for School Innovation is contained in this section of our manual. However, the spaces provided in which to write, both boxes and groups of lines, have been significantly minimized to conserve space here. Anyone wishing to use the actual Project for School Innovation

material should contact its Director, Michael Rothman, at the address below. Otherwise, please do not take the minimal spaces provided here as limits on what you, your team or your participants can use for your own school processes.

Michael Rothman, Director
Project for School Innovation
*An Initiative of Neighborhood House
Charter School*

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in Action Planning processes at their schools.*



STEP 1. GOALS

In figuring just how you will implement your practice, it is important to be clear about what your goals are. Your goals are divided into two sections. Teaching goals describe how you expect teaching at your school to improve as a result of implementing the practice. Learning goals describe how you expect learning at your school to improve as a result of implementing the practice.

STEP 2. LANDSCAPE

The second step in developing your action plan is to analyze the landscape in which you plan to implement the practice. It helps to think of this in four areas: the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that will help or hinder your efforts. This will help you to be most effective in making change occur.

STEP 3. PRACTICE

Now that you know your goals and environment, lay out exactly what it is you want to accomplish. Start by describing the basics of the practice you want to put in place and how you are building off of what you have learned from other schools.

STEP 4. BENCHMARKS

The fourth step in developing your action plan is to lay out key benchmarks. This should not go into high level of detail, but should give you a roadmap with the major milestones that will help you know whether you are on course to reach your goals over time.

STEP 5. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The fifth step in developing your action plan is to consider what the key roles and responsibilities are and how you will divide them up among members of your team. By taking responsibility for action that grows out of the goals, benchmarks, and landscape, you help ensure that the ideas you develop here will turn into action when you return to your school.

STEP 6. BASELINE

Finally, before you start implementing your Action Plan, it is important to have baseline data. This is the information that will serve as a starting point so that when you look back on what you have done a year from now, you will be able to tell whether you made the progress and had the impact that you intended.

STEP 1. GOALS

Teaching Goals

One year from now, how will you know if this practice has had the intended impact on teaching? Be as specific and concrete as possible—try to use numbers and focus on something that you can actually observe. Identify no more than 2-4 goals.

GOAL

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

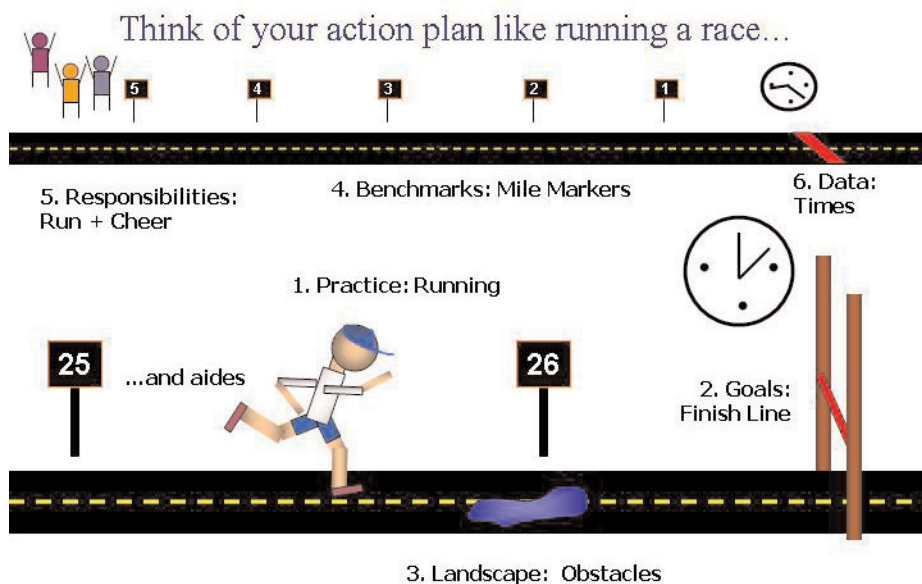
Learning Goals

If you have a separate goal for student learning, what is it? One year from now, how will you know if this practice has had the intended impact on students? Be as specific and concrete as possible—try to use numbers and focus on something that you can actually observe. Identify no more than 2-4 goals.

GOAL

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

STEP 2. LANDSCAPE



STEP 3. PRACTICE

What is the practice you are planning to put in place? Write a brief paragraph describing what it will look like once it is in place.

What are a few of the specific ideas that you got from other schools in developing this plan? How do these ideas then appear in your plan? Write down 3-5 specific elements below.

What's Happening at Other School	How We Will Use It at Our School

Strengths

What strengths does your school team bring that will help make this easier to accomplish? What strengths do others at your school bring?

Weaknesses

What weaknesses at your school will make it challenging to make this happen? What reasons would others have to challenge this practice?

Opportunities

What else is coming up in the future at your school that will make it easier to do this?

Threats

What will be happening at your school next year that could get in the way of this succeeding?

STEP 4. BENCHMARKS

Implementation Benchmarks

In Step 3, you picked a practice. Pick important points in time when you will be able to check whether you are making the progress you want towards implementing that practice. For instance, if teachers will all be using a new curriculum by the middle of the year, you may set a benchmark of having everyone trained in that curriculum by November. (Feel free to use the back of pages to add additional benchmarks if needed.)

Preparation: *Prior to Implementation*

What will you need to do to be fully prepared when it is time to begin implementation?

Date/Event	Benchmark
1.	
2.	
3.	

Pilot Implementation

What will you do to first implement the practice? This should be done at a “pilot” scale, and reflect the plans you describe in the third column under Step 1.

Date/Event	Benchmark
1.	
2.	
3.	

Review and Sharing Results

What will you do to collect, review, and share results so that others at the school can decide whether it makes sense for more of the school? This may include dates before, during, and after implementation.

Date/Event	Benchmark
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

Teaching/Learning Benchmarks

In Step 1, you set Teaching and Learning Goals. Pick three points in time when you will be able to check whether you are making progress towards your learning goals. For instance, if you expect students to make at least one grade level progress in reading, what can you use halfway through the year to see if they are moving in the right direction? What you're your benchmarks be? When will you check, and what will you look for to be satisfied that you are making adequate progress?

Date/Event	Benchmark
1.	
2.	
3.	

STEP 5: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

What are the most important things that you will need to do to put your practice in place in such a way that you reach your benchmark or benchmarks? What is the most logical way to assign responsibility among the members of your school team in order to be sure that this will happen?

Activity	Completion Date	Person Responsible

STEP 6: BASELINE DATA

You can't know where you are trying to end up if you don't know where you are starting! In Step 1, you set goals. Jot down what those goals were in the first column below.

For each of the goals you have set, what is your starting point? If you can, express that starting point as a numerical figure. For instance, if you are expecting to increase students' reading level, what is the current average reading level for students at each grade? If you are expecting to reduce absenteeism, what is the current absentee rate? If you can, write this in the second column.

Often, it is difficult to find data to quantify your starting point. If this is the case, where do you think you could find the data? Is it available in records kept by the school? Is it something you could get by surveying students, parents, or teachers? Is it something you could get by observing students or teachers? Write this in the third column.

Goal (from Step 1)	Starting Point	Source of Data

Survey Results

Method

The Lawrence Family Development Charter School parent involvement survey was conducted from October 2002 until March 2003, following a 6 month planning and writing process. It was created and conducted by Robert Apsler, Ph.D., President of Social Science Research & Evaluation, Inc. and a faculty member of Harvard Medical School, and Jacquelin Apsler, M.Ed., MBA, an educator. The data was analyzed by the Apslers and staff from the Lawrence Family Development Charter School.

The survey was constructed from a series of interviews with charter schools that had gone through the re-chartering process and which had reported good success involving parents with their schools. This interview information was then categorized under the “Framework of Six Types of Involvement” developed by Joyce Epstein’s National Network of Partnership Schools (2) and formatted into a questionnaire to be answered by parents, teachers, school administrators and other school staff at Massachusetts charter schools. The survey questions were described earlier in this manual in the “About the Survey” section of the Introduction and the English version of the actual survey can be found in the Conclusions and Resources section. The survey was also translated into Khmer and Spanish and made available in all three languages.

The survey was sent either directly to parents and teachers from a mailing list provided by the school or distributed by a school administrator on a random basis to parents and school staff. All responses were anonymous and were sent directly to the Apsler research team for processing. The respondents were asked to provide only the name of their school in order to keep track of where responses were originating.

NUMBERS:

How many surveys were distributed and how many were returned?

Number of participating schools:	25 of 27 targeted charter schools
Number of surveys distributed:	2,300
Response rate:	41% (950 completed questionnaires)

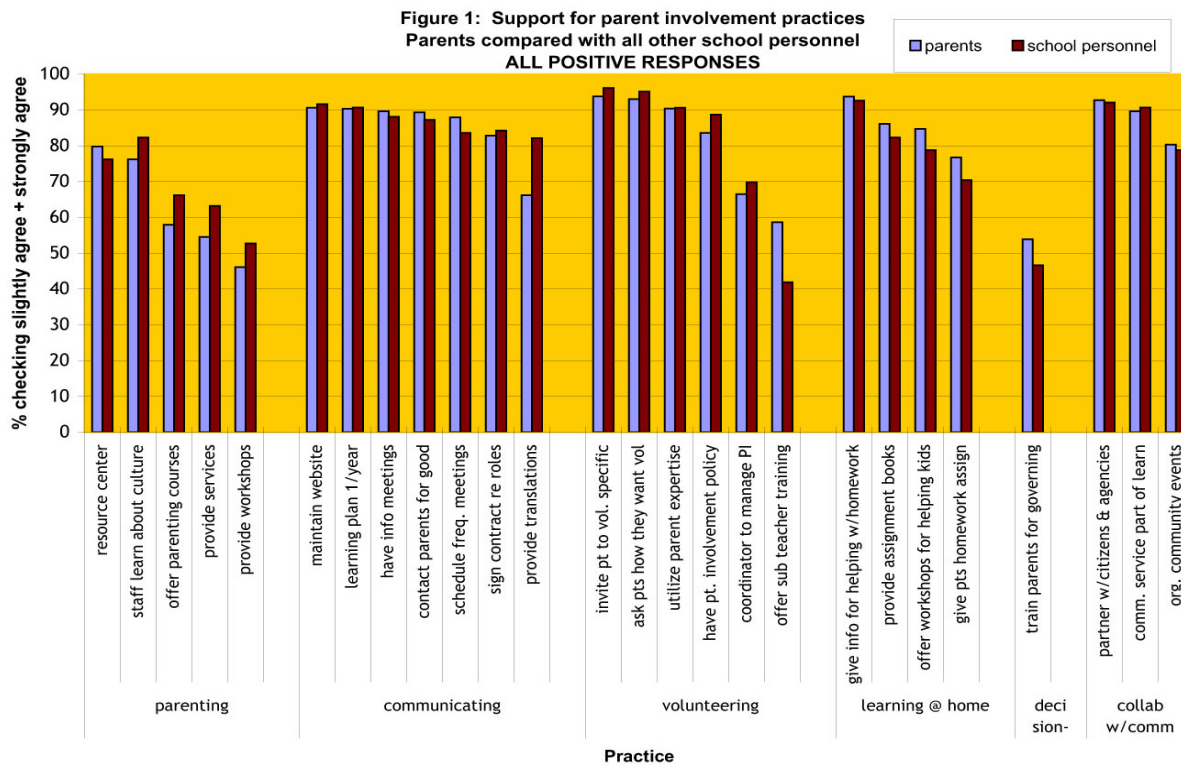
DEMOGRAPHICS:

Who were the people responding to the survey?

Gender:	90% of parents and 75% of staff were female.
Where educated?:	14% of parents and 3% of staff were educated only <i>outside</i> the United States
Educational level:	80% of parents had post-secondary school education
Diversity of parents:	63% white; 26% Hispanic/Latino; approx. 3% African-American
Diversity of staff:	83% white; 9% Hispanic/Latino; approx. 3% African-American

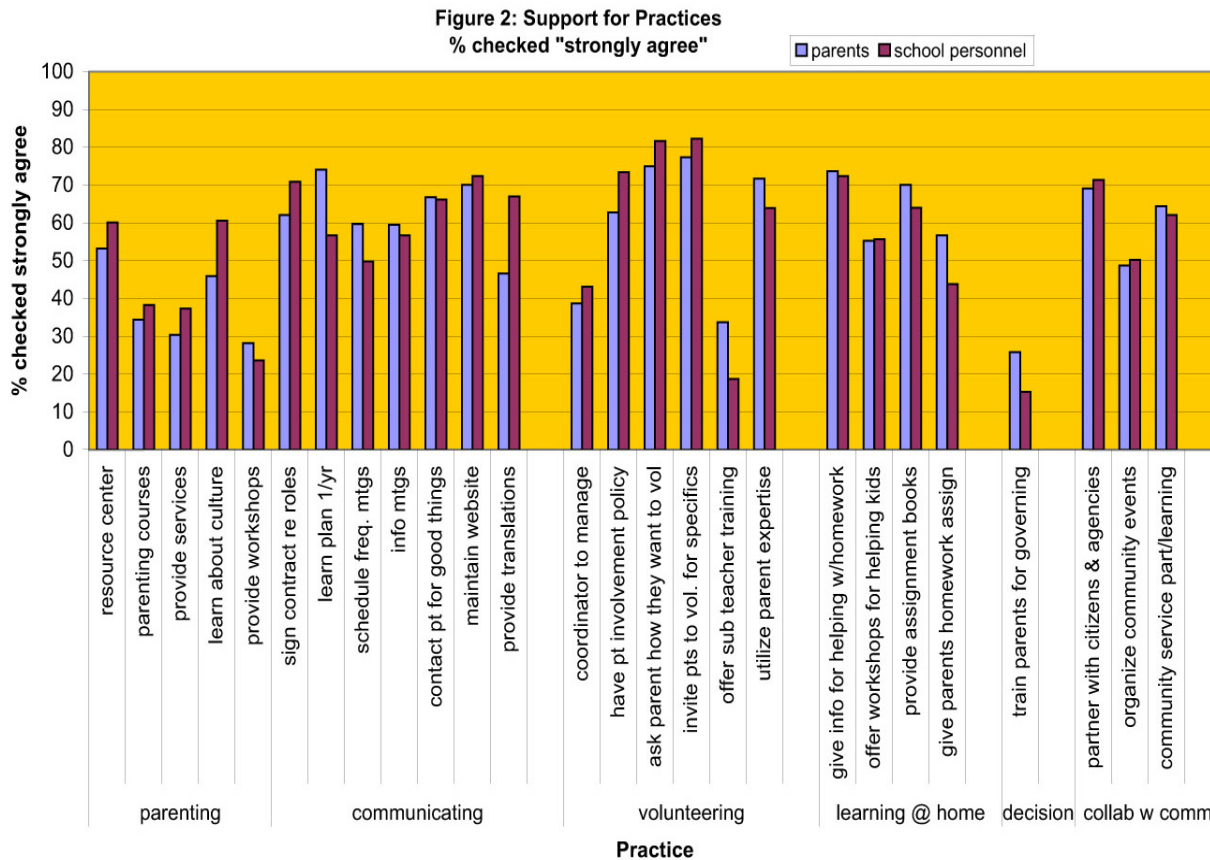
SURVEY RESULTS

In general, responses to the parent involvement practices described in this survey were overwhelmingly positive. Most of the respondents marked “slightly agree” or “strongly agree” with most of the statements, which were phrased, “A Charter School should...” Figure 1 presents this general overview of the responses to the questions phrased in this manner. Further analysis was performed on these data to understand the finer points of respondents’ opinions. It should also be noted that some of the questions (those focusing on the role of parents in decision-making, questions about the frequency of school/home activities and questions about obstacles) were phrased and answered differently and will be reported upon later in this section. [Please see actual survey at the end of the Manual for phrasing of the actual questions.]



In Figure 1 it is apparent that almost all of the practices were approved of by both parents and school personnel at least 50% of the time.

Looking a bit more closely, however, it is possible to evaluate which of the 26 practices presented to the respondents were viewed the most favorably. Figure 2 shows the same list of practices, but this time the data show the percentage of respondents who marked “**strongly agree**” (as opposed to combining **all** positive responses, slightly agree plus strongly agree, in Figure 1.) [Please see actual survey at the end of the Manual for phrasing of the actual questions.]



In Figure 2 there is more variation apparent and it is possible to perceive some differences in how these practices are viewed by parents and school staff. For example, it appears that while school staff said that it is important to learn about families' culture (approx. 61%), parents rated this item only at about the 46% level. Similarly, the issue of "providing translations" to non-English speaking parents was rated at 67% by staff and only at about 47% by parents, indicating that school personnel and parents may have different priorities.

Most Favored Categories

In general, **Communicating**, **Volunteering** and **Learning at Home** were the 3 most valued categories of the 6 in the Joyce Epstein framework, with almost all of the most favored practices (14/16 for parents and 13/18 for school personnel) falling within those 3 categories.

Surprisingly to LFDCS staff creating this survey, the whole category of **Parenting** was less favorably ranked than any other. Of the 3 items in this category that describe the variety of services, workshops and courses that schools might provide, all 3 received among the lowest favorability ratings in the whole survey. Only the questions about "providing substitute teacher training," (an admittedly unique practice developed at LFDCS) and "training parents for governing" (a complicated issue to be discussed later) were ranked lower overall in the survey. Again, this seems to reflect on schools providing what parents actually want rather than trying to provide what they *think* that parents want. For example, 87.3% of LFDCS respondents strongly agreed or slightly agreed that a charter school should offer training for parents to become substitute teachers. Clearly, parents at LFDCS want substitute teacher training.

Most favored practices

Figure 3 below is a chart which ranks the practices on the basis of favorability, starting from the most favorably ranked (those marked “strongly agree” more than 70% of the time) and is followed by Figure 4 which lists those in the next level down, namely practices ranked “strongly agree” by 50% to 70% of the respondents. Thus the following two charts compare rankings of practices chosen by parents and school personnel from first through 18th on our survey (taking into account that there were several ties.)

Figure 3: Top 7 Parent Involvement Practices - 70% or greater favorability Parents & School Personnel

rank	Parents: “A Charter School should...”	% strongly agree	rank	School personnel “A Charter School should...”	% strongly agree
1	Invite Parents to volunteer for specifics (V)	77.4	1	Invite parents to volunteer for specifics (V)	82.3
2	Ask parents how they want to volunteer (V)	75.0	2	Ask parents how they want to volunteer (V)	81.7
3	Learning plan at least 1/yr (C)	74.1	3	Have a written parent involvement policy (V)	73.4
4	Give info for helping with homework (L@H)	73.7	4 tie	Maintain a website (C)	72.4
5	Utilize parent expertise (V)	71.7	4 tie	Give info for helping w/ homework (L@H)	72.4
6 tie	Maintain website (C)	70.1	5	Partner with citizens and agencies (CC)	71.4
6 tie	Provide assignment books (L@H)	70.1	6	Sign a contract re: roles (C)	70.9

(codes: P= parenting; V=volunteering; C=communicating; L@H=learning at home; CC=collaborating with the community D-M=decision-making)

Figure 4: 2nd Tier Parent Involvement Practices - 50%-70% favorability Parents & School Personnel

rank	Parents “A Charter School should...”	% strongly agree	rank	School personnel “A Charter School should...”	% strongly agree
7	Partner w/citizens and agencies (CC)	69.1	7	Provide translations (C)	67.0
8	Contact parents for good things (C)	66.8	8	Contact parents for good things (C)	66.2
9	Community service part of learning (CC)	64.4	9	Provide assignment books (L@H)	64.0
10	Have a written pt involvement policy (V)	62.8	10	Utilize parents’ expertise (V)	63.9
11	Sign a contract re: roles (C)	62.1	11	Community service part of learning (CC)	62.1
12	Schedule frequent meetings open to all(C)	59.7	12	Learn about culture (P)	60.6
13	Regular informational meetings (C)	59.5	13	Establish a resource center for parents (P)	60.1
14	Give parents homework assignments (L@H)	56.7	14 tie	Learning plan at least 1/yr (C)	56.7
15	Offer workshops for helping kids (L@H)	55.3	14 tie	Regular informational meetings (C)	56.7
16	Establish a resource center for parents(P)	53.2	15	Offer workshops for helping kids (L@H)	55.7
			16	Organize community events (CC)	50.2

(codes: P= parenting; V=volunteering; C=communicating; L@H=learning at home; CC=collaborating with the community D-M=decision-making)

Although there is some variation in choice among these practices, in fact, 11 of the top 12 are the same for both parents and school personnel, namely:

Volunteering

- ❖ Parents should be invited to volunteer for specific activities as needed (e.g. chaperoning, clerical help, “handyman” tasks, book fairs, cooking, fundraising, etc.)
- ❖ Parents should be asked for ways in which they would like to volunteer:
- ❖ A charter school should utilize parents’ expertise to teach enrichment workshops, provide career examples, develop internships for students, become reading or writing mentors, etc.:

Communicating

- ❖ A charter school should maintain a website with essential, up-to-date information

- ❖ Each student, the student’s parents, and the charter school should sign a contract stating everyone’s role in the student’s education.
- ❖ A charter school’s expectations for parent involvement should be stated in a written policy:
- ❖ A charter school should have a policy to contact parents when good things happen regarding their child’s academic performance, behavior, or citizenship.

Learning at Home

- ❖ A charter school should give parents information about how to help their children with homework:
- ❖ A charter school should provide each student with an assignment book for recording daily assignments that can also be reviewed and signed by parents:

Collaborating with the Community

- ❖ A charter school should partner with citizens and agencies to provide specialized learning opportunities for students (e.g. artists-in-residence, drama coaches, after-school activities, mentors, internships, homework clubs, etc.):
- ❖ Community services should be an important component of each student’s learning experiences

As you can see, the practices that won the most favorable ratings from both parents and school personnel involved those that reached out directly to parents in individualized ways: asking them to volunteer for specific events or activities and asking parents specifically how they want to volunteer, as well as using their particular forms of expertise. Parents also were concerned about how schools communicate with them about their children and appreciated knowing explicit expectations for involvement, as well as any help schools can give them to assist and oversee their children’s homework.

One practice focused on by several of our conference presenters is reflected in the item “contacting parents for good things” that children do at school. This practice fits in with the overall concept of strengths-based approaches to youth development that were highlighted in many of our presenters’ work – rather than mainly contacting parents when children have problems or misbehave.

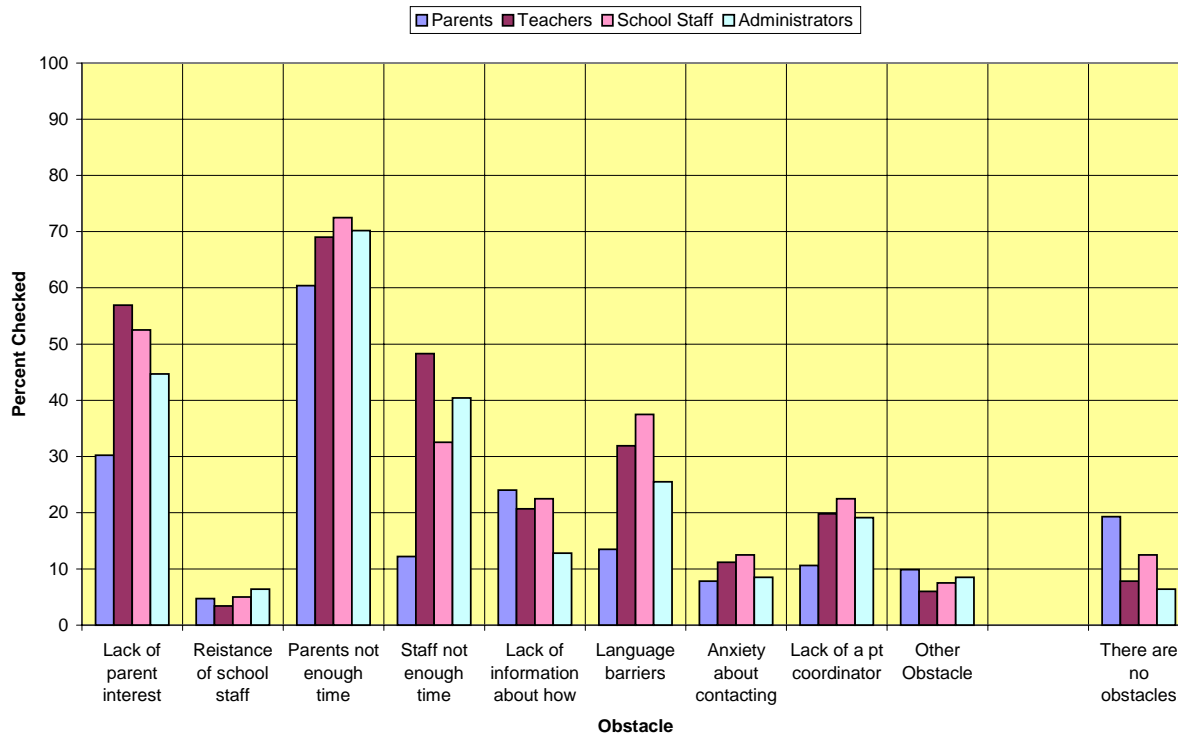
Obstacles to Parent Involvement

The question of what the obstacles are to parent involvement in schools was also phrased differently in our survey. In this section, respondents were asked to **check all that apply** from the following list of obstacles:

1	Lack of parent interest
2	School staff resistance
3	Parents do not have enough time
4	Staff do not have enough time
5	Lack of information about how parents can be involved
6	Language barriers
7	Anxiety about contacting school
8	No one is available to coordinate organize parent involvement
9	Other (write in):
10	There are no obstacles

The results are reported in Figure 5 below:

Figure 5: Obstacles to Parent Involvement Identified by Each Role at School



It is apparent from this graph that there are some significant differences in what parents and school personnel view as the obstacles to parent involvement. In the first place, parents perceive fewer barriers to their involvement overall than do school personnel, except in a very few cases.

Generally speaking, neither parents nor school staff view staff as resistant to parent involvement and the issue of “anxiety about contacting the school” seems also to play a small role as an obstacle. The main issue for all, and with very little disagreement, is that parents do not have enough time. We found that school personnel may *think* that parents are not interested a fairly significant amount of the time (between 45%-55% of the time), but parents view *themselves* as uninterested, much less (30%). Staff, as might be expected, view *themselves* as not having enough time (32%-48%), but parents rated this at a much lower level (12%). Similarly, staff people found language barriers to be significant much more than parents did.

Lack of information about how to contact the school and lack of a parent coordinator (an issue mentioned by almost all of our conference presenters as a key ingredient) were noted by less than a quarter of our respondents and may be worth investigating in individual schools. These two issues seem to go together as a larger matter of how parent involvement in schools is made known to parents and whether access appears simple or complicated.

On the issue of time, Holly Kreider, Ph.D. quoted a study she was involved in which investigated the relative involvement of mothers who worked part time, full time or were unemployed (7). This study found that part-time working mothers were the most involved with their children’s schools; full time working mothers were in the middle as to level of school involvement and non-working mothers were the least involved. The researcher’s conclusion was that work acted as both an obstacle and an opportunity. One has to literally have the time to participate in activities, but then people who are working may have more resources available than those who do not and their self-esteem and sense of efficacy may be higher, thus facilitating involvement.

The Role of Parents in Decision-Making

As most educators know, parental involvement is an integral part of the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and certain of the questions asked in our survey relate to requirements of the NCLB. For example, Section 1118 of NCLB spells out requirements that schools and districts (LEA's) receiving Title I funds:

- ❖ Write a policy for parent involvement and include parent input to that policy
- ❖ Plan a program for parent involvement that is developed jointly with school personnel and parents who are participants
- ❖ Involve parents in the process of school review and improvement
- ❖ Provide support and resources in implementing parent involvement practices and building the capacity of parents to participate (such as providing workshops to parents that will help them and/or enhance their student's performance.)
- ❖ Involve parents in decision-making on how some funds, specifically Title I, funds are allocated.¹

NCLB does not spell out precisely to what extent parents need to be involved in school activities and the issue of how parents might be involved in schools and districts continues to provoke divided thought and strong reactions. At our conference, the presentation of one school, Hilltown Cooperative Charter School, focused specifically on their experience developing a true consensus-based decision-making model such that their school is in fact a cooperative endeavor, and one which has served as a model for student empowerment as well. (Please refer back to the Manual and Conference section of this document for specific details on the Hilltown Cooperative Charter School experience.)

Material in the Massachusetts Charter Schools Trustees Guide (1) and the Renewal Findings of the First Fourteen Massachusetts Charter School Renewal Inspection Reports ² seem to caution against a predominance of parent involvement on boards. The Renewal Findings, which surveyed inspection reports from 14 charter schools once they were re-chartered after their first 5 years, indicates that some parental involvement on boards is necessary and desirable but that boards led by parents have at times been problematic. The Trustees Guide emphasizes the critical skills that individuals bring to board membership and their ability to align themselves with the school's mission, to put the organization's needs first over their own personal agendas, rather than a narrower view that parents may have of their own children's needs.

To what extent *should* parents be involved?

Our survey asked this question quite specifically. Respondents were asked one typical question, "Should a Charter School Train Parents for Governing?" They were then asked **not** whether they agreed or disagreed with specific practices, but **to what extent** they thought parents should be involved in different types of Decision-Making activities within the school. Instead of being asked to rate a 5 point scale from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," respondents were asked to decide whether they thought parents should be involved as

...sole decision-makers
...the majority on committees
...equal partners
...asked for input
...parent input not necessary

regarding parental involvement in

¹ See the National Network of Partnership Schools website for a clear description of how parent involvement activities can be leveraged to meet NCLBA requirements. A downloadable PDF file may be found on the website at:
http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/pdf/nochild/sec_%201118forweb1102.pdf

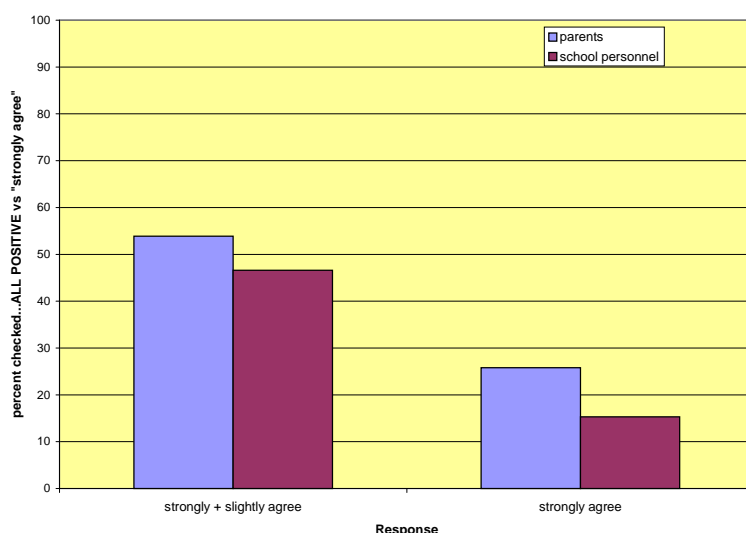
² www.pioneerinstitute.org/pdf/renew.pdf

- ❖ POLICY decisions
- ❖ FINANCIAL decisions
- ❖ CURRICULUM development
- ❖ HIRING teachers
- ❖ EVALUATING teachers

Please note: this was an opinion survey. The results reflect the personal reactions of the respondents, not opinions necessarily based on research, reading or even in all cases their own school's policy.

As you can see in Figure 6 below, when the first question is judged on the same criteria as the rest of the survey questions, it appears to be among the least favorable items, garnering only a 15.3% strong approval rating from school personnel and only a 25.8% strong approval rating from parents themselves. When the approval rating is expanded to include *all* positive responses, that is, answers marked “slightly agree + strongly agree,” the approval rating is higher: 46.6% from school personnel and 53.9% for parents.

Figure 6: Should a CS train parents for governing?



It is interesting to explore this category of questions further, and the results are reported in detail [here](#).

On the next few pages you will find charts displaying the opinions of parents and school personnel about the extent of the role parents should play in each of the possible decision-making activities within a school: **policy** decisions, **financial** decisions, **curriculum** development, **hiring** teachers and **evaluating** teachers.

Figure 7: Role parents should have in POLICY decisions

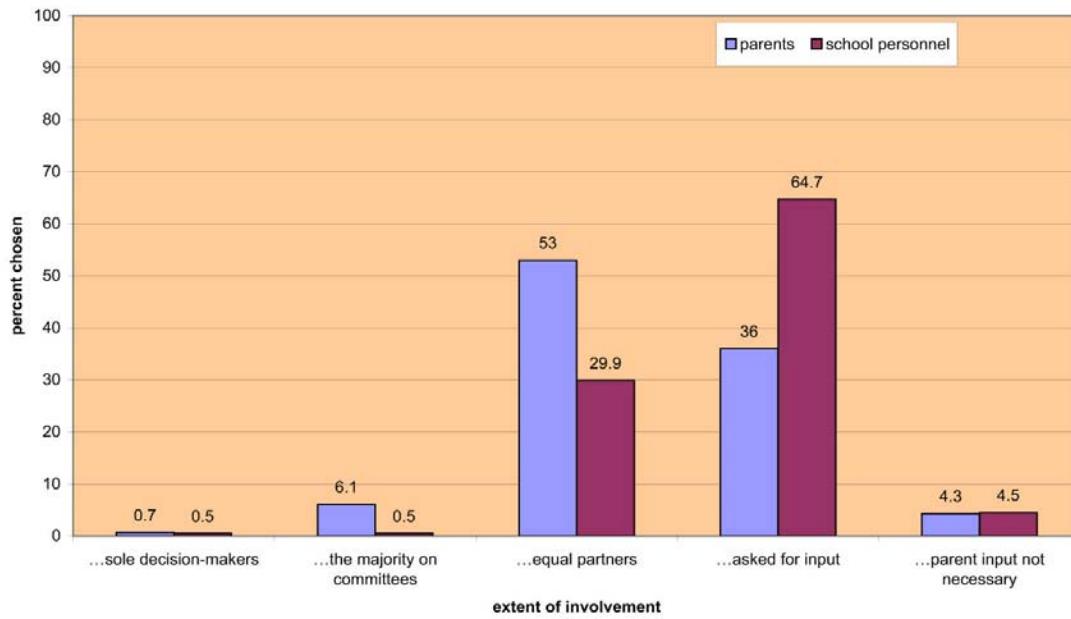


Figure 8: Role parents should have in FINANCIAL decisions

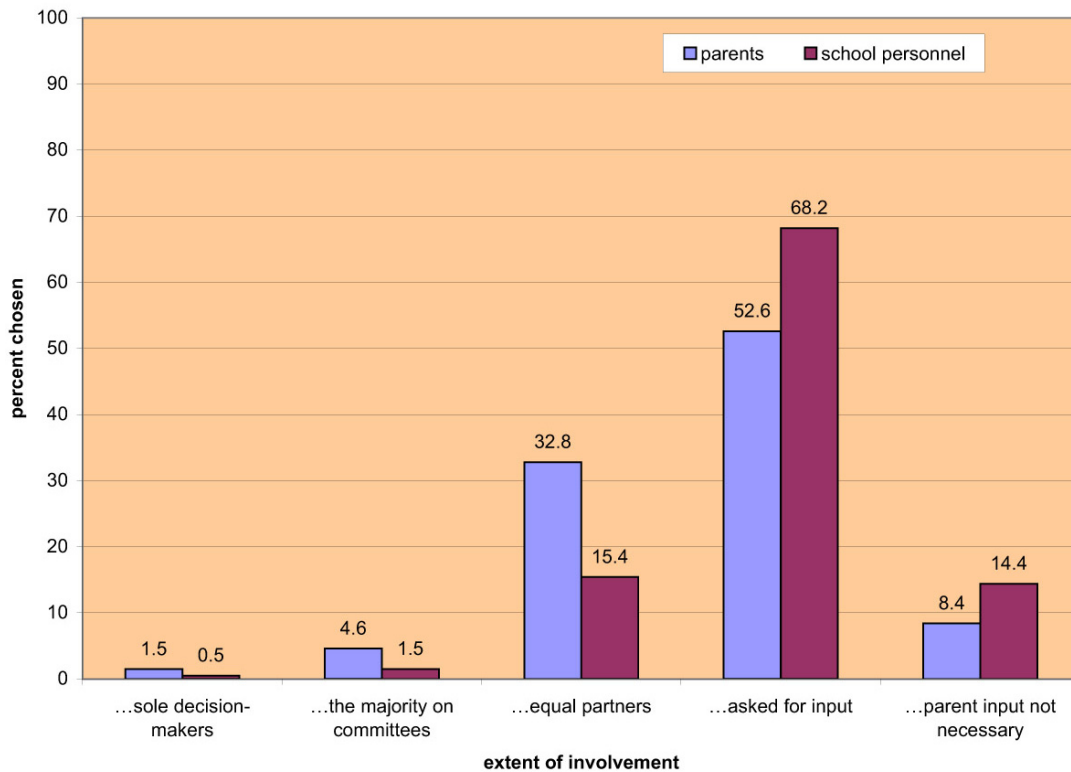


Figure 9: Role parents should have in CURRICULUM development

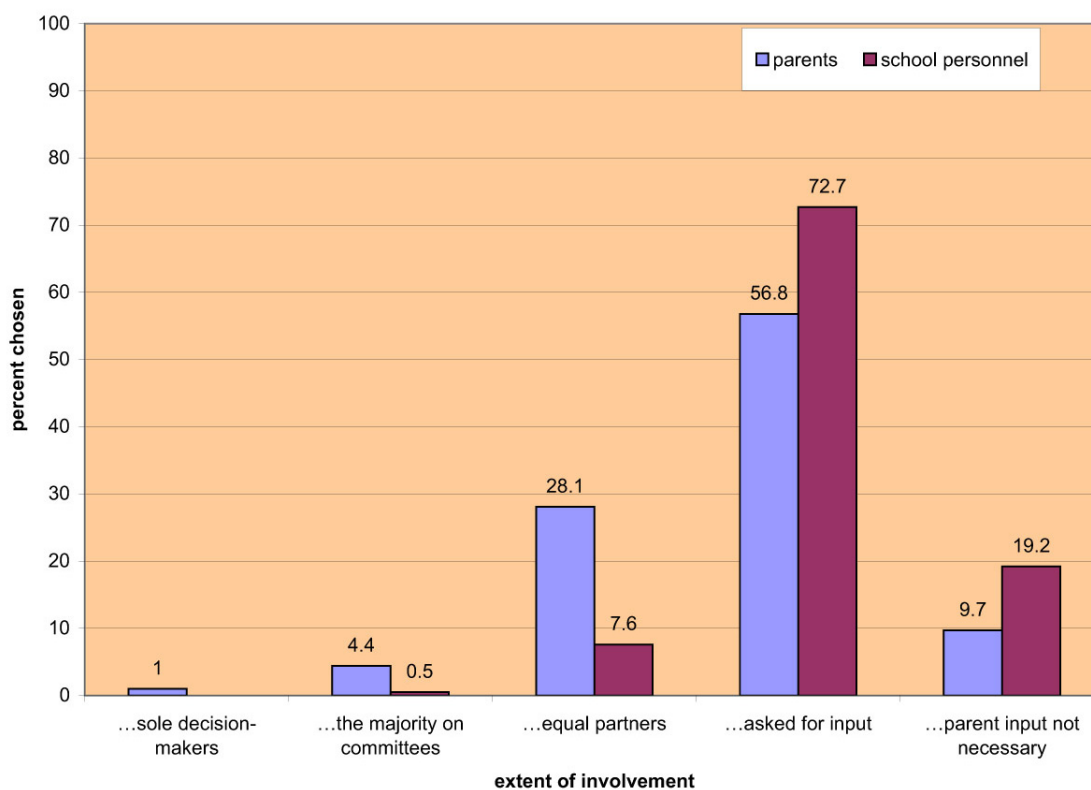


Figure 10: Role parents should have in HIRING TEACHERS

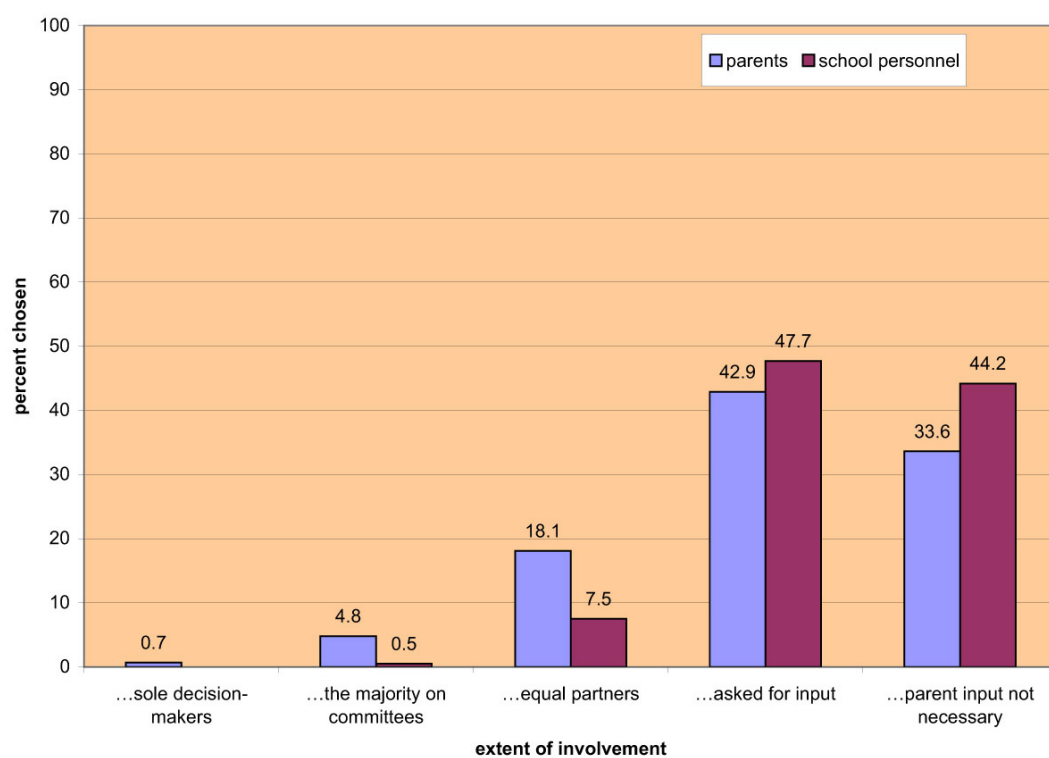
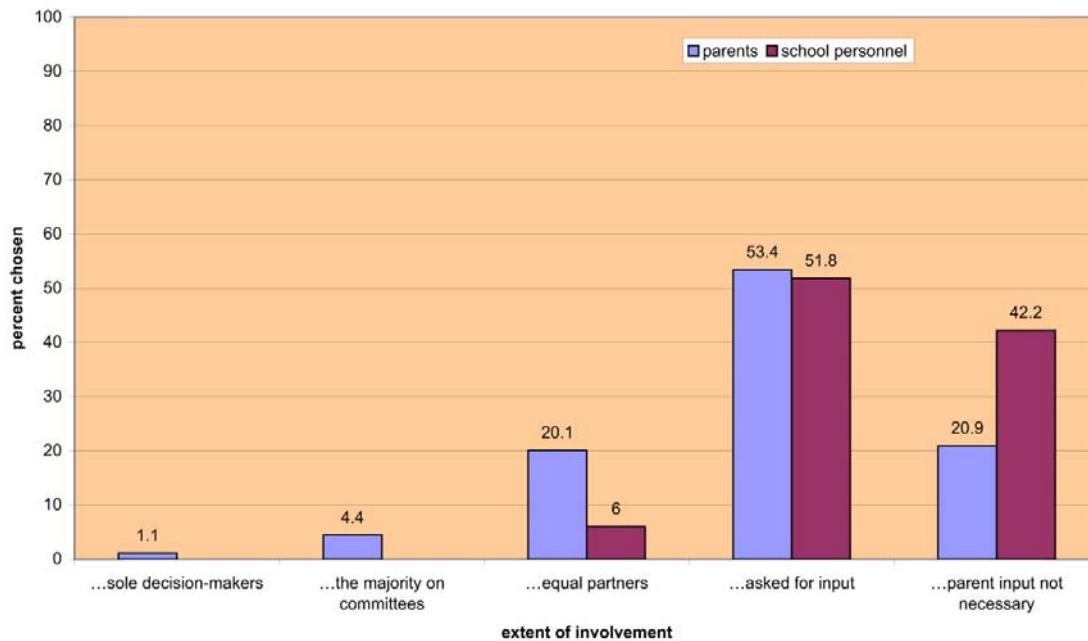


Figure 11: Role Parents should have in EVALUATING TEACHERS



One thing is very clear from these data: almost no one among the almost 1,000 individuals surveyed thought that parents should be the “sole decision makers” or even “the majority on committees” for any of these types of decision-making. In 3 of our 5 categories, the main argument was about whether parents should be “equal partners” or “asked for input,” and, in fact, in the real world, whether parents have an equal say to school personnel regarding Policy Decisions, Financial Decisions and Curriculum Decisions or whether they are merely “asked for input” would create a significantly different experience at a school. In our survey, generally speaking, on these 3 categories, the only response for which a majority of parents answered “equal partners” was on Policy Decisions. For Financial Decisions and Curriculum Decisions, parents still opted to be “asked for input” most of the time. There seemed to be a much stronger impulse to have an equal say on the Big Picture matter of Policy Decisions than in any area of the nitty-gritty operation of the school.

This distinction was even more pronounced in the area of Hiring and Evaluating Teachers. Here, for the first time, the choice “parent involvement not necessary” drew more responses from both parents and school personnel, although the most preferred choice continued to be “asked for input.” There did seem to be a trend on the part of parents to opt out of the hiring and evaluating of teachers, but they did want to have their say.

Some of these responses undoubtedly reflect on a fact alluded to in the Introduction to this report, that Charter Schools need parents as much as parents need Charter Schools. In the case of Policy Decisions, for example, where parents can be a driving force behind the creation of Charter Schools, they might have strong feelings and much to say about its mission and policies. Whereas, in a survey of parents connected to traditional district schools, the desire to be involved with Policy might be much lower, but they may still be happy to be asked for input on a variety of matters connected to the school.

COMPARISONS OF SUBGROUPS OF PARENTS

Other variables looked at by the survey team involved differences in responses related to the grade of a parents' child in the school and the primary language spoken at home. Some of the results of these comparisons are below.

Grade of Child in School

When the data were sorted to look at the reactions of parents with only 1 child in a charter school, (in order to eliminate the effects of parents' reacting based on students in several grades) the results found that parents of pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten students

- ...want the most services (workshops, parent training)
- ...want more frequent mandatory parent/teacher meetings.
- ...major obstacle is lack of information about how to be involved.

Primary Language Spoken at Home

When the data were analyzed to look at differences between parents whose primary language spoken at home was English (n=442) vs. primary language spoken at home Spanish (n=148), the survey found that

- ...Spanish-speaking parents strongly favor more services than English-speaking parents (resource centers and parenting courses)
- ...Spanish-speaking parents want more frequent contact with the schools.
- ...Spanish-speaking parents want to play a larger role in decision making.

In addition...

An unusually high number of respondents took the time to add free comments to the questionnaire, a total of 515 free responses. This type of response is seen as an indicator of a high level of interest in the issues.

Most of these comments validated issues covered in the survey and focused on:

- ... parents like regular progress reporting on their children
- ... parents like open houses, performances, suppers, etc.
- ... parents like regular communication such as bulletins and newsletters
- ... parents want to take advantage of their expertise to enrich students' learning experience.

Conclusions and Resources

SO, WHAT DOES ALL THIS MEAN?

Conclusions from the survey responses

- ❖ Communicating, Volunteering, and Learning at Home are the most valued types of parent involvement for both parents and school personnel.
- ❖ The similarities between parents' opinions and school personnel's opinions are greater than their differences.
- ❖ Parents will volunteer at school if asked individually and if school personnel take the time to know what parents have to offer.
- ❖ Parents will definitely seek help to learn how to help their children with school and homework, but not necessarily with how to parent them.
- ❖ Written policies and contracts are seen as helpful for both parents and school.
- ❖ Websites are an appreciated method of communication.
- ❖ Time is the main obstacle to parent involvement.
- ❖ Decision-making at schools is a complex issue. Not surprisingly, when asked, parents were more interested in being equal partners on some decisions than school personnel wanted them to be. But, more often, they preferred to be "asked for input." In general, parents did not seem to want to take on the roles of teachers or administrators, but say they do want to be heard. [At our conference, we did present a model of how parents can be integral to school operations. (See the section on Hilltown Cooperative Charter School for more detail on how this can work successfully.)]

Conclusions from the conference presentations

Certain common themes also seemed to emerge from the conference presentations.

- ❖ Communication is the most important element in keeping parents involved with school.
- ❖ Initial procedures, such as Interest Inventories, Volunteer Resource Forms and Parent Interview Protocols all help staff to formulate what they want to know from parents and are tools for individualizing their approaches.
- ❖ Parent Involvement policies which are articulated into a Family Learning Contract, Community Compact of Understanding or the like help parents to understand what the school's expectations are and how parents can meet them.
- ❖ Parents are most responsive when they have been asked what their skills are and when they are personally invited to volunteer for a school activity that suits their abilities.
- ❖ One crucial point person whom the parents see as accessible, understanding and compassionate (and who speaks their language) can make all the difference in a successful parent involvement program and increases the likelihood that individual contacts will be made.

- ❖ Supporting parent strengths and cultures, calling parents to report on positive aspects of a child's day (instead of just calling about problems) and taking a strengths-based approach to education and behavior management all help to promote parent involvement.
- ❖ Parents appreciate frequent meetings with teachers and are more responsive when they see that the staff knows and understands *their* child.
- ❖ Children are empowered to effect change when they see their parents being empowered to effect change; learning this in the context of improving the environment at school affects everybody.
- ❖ Literacy remains the cornerstone of education; addressing literacy in the family environment improves everybody's functioning.
- ❖ Literacy refers to Math skills as well as reading.

This research has illustrated the various ways that charter schools have benefited from the enhanced involvement of parents. Parents choose charter schools for their children and charter schools, with limited resources, are forced to be creative in their approaches to some basic institutional needs. This mutuality sets the stage for schools to need parents as much as parents need schools. Although traditional public schools may not have the same needs, all can learn from the practices that have been found in Charter Schools to benefit parents, their children and the schools in myriad ways.

References to the Text

1. Cornell-Feist, Marci, **Massachusetts Charter schools TRUSTEES GUIDE**, published by the Massachusetts Charter School Resource Center at Pioneer Institute, 85 Devonshire St., Boston, MA.
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3. Family Involvement Network of Educators (2002). FINE Forum, Issue 5. Available online at <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/fine/fineforum/forum5/director.html>. (A forum on Jane Addams School for Democracy. This link also provides a wealth of resources on school-community linkages with immigrant families)
4. Lawrence-Lightfoot, S. (2003). The Essential Conversation: What parents and teachers can learn from each other. New York: Random House.
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6. Moll, L.C., Amani, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1991) Funds of knowledge for teaching: using a qualitative approach to connect home and classrooms. Theory into Practice, 31, 131-141.
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Websites and Other Resources

Some of the information gathered for this project came from the following sources. Much more is available on the Internet, through the ERIC database and at your local bookstore. Some of the top sources are listed below.

For general and specific information about **Massachusetts Charter Schools**: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter>

Building Excellent Schools (formerly Massachusetts Charter School Resource Center at the Pioneer Institute) <http://www.buildingexcellentschool.org/index.cfm>

The Massachusetts Charter School Association supports the identification and publication of best practices and innovations of Mass. Charter Schools. On their website you will find numerous papers written by leaders at Massachusetts Charter Schools (including those presenting at our conference) and information about their annual Convention and its Best Practices Showcase. <http://www.masscharterschools.org/index.html>

The Harvard Family Research Project - *"For nearly twenty years, Harvard Family Research Project has helped philanthropies, policymakers, and practitioners develop strategies to promote the educational and social success and well-being of children, families, and their communities. As it guides organizations in planning and assists in problem solving, HFRP collects, analyzes, and synthesizes research and information to foster continuous improvement and learning."* <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/about/history.html>

The National Network of Partnership Schools is a nationwide, Federally supported research center based at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, MD that focuses on supplying technical assistance for helping schools partner with families and communities to improve student outcomes. They too host a large conference twice a year and substantial material is available for downloading and use from their website. <http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/default/htm>

Teamwork Makes the Dream Work: A Staff Resource Book for Developing Home-School Partnerships that is downloadable from the web, created by the San Diego City Schools
http://www.parent.sdsu.edu/teamwork/toc_teamwork.htm

Boston Excels and Community Schools at www.communityschools.org/Boston.html
A "**Briefing Paper**" on Full Service Schools at www.thehome.org/site/pdf/excels_briefing.pdf

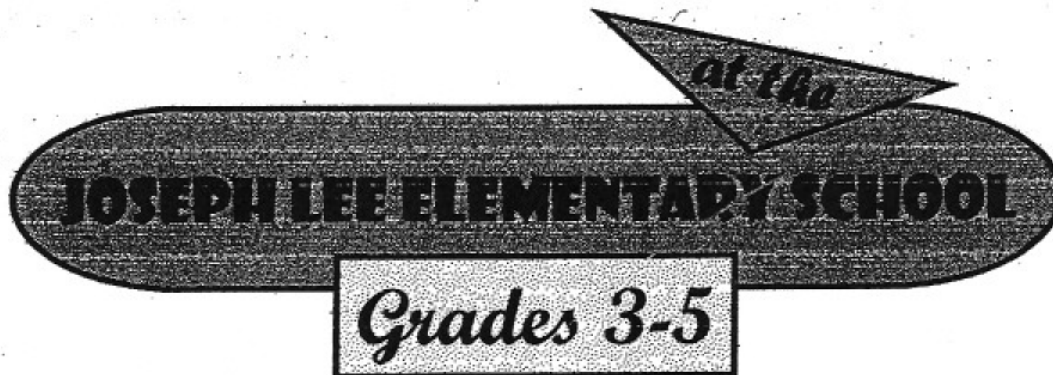
Project for School Innovation website can be found at www.nhcsonline.org/PSI/about.html

Lauren Bessen, our web and publication designer's website at www.laurenbessen.com

Carla J. Fink, MSSA, LICSW, Project Manager's resume website at <http://mysite.verizon.net/vze3twhm/>

There are numerous other easily-accessible websites that present information regarding Parent Involvement in education and best practices, including NCREL (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory), NCPPIE (the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education), the ERIC Clearinghouse of educational scholarship and the PTA. Just type Parent Involvement into a search engine and many of these will pop up for you.

Family Math Challenge



TO WIN RECOGNITION AND PRIZES:

- ☐ Parents and children must work together! A parent, grandparent, or guardian must SIGN the form verifying that adults and children have worked together!
- ☐ You must complete ALL questions!
- ☐ You must get your entry in by _____.
- ☐ You must follow ALL directions correctly.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION OR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PROBLEMS,
CALL ALICE LEVINE (617) 327-3222**

**Sponsored by the Lee Parents Active in Math and Boston Excels /
The Home for Little Wanderers**

Family Math Challenge



Grades 3-5

1 3 6 10 15 21 28 36 45 55 _____

Explain this pattern: _____

1 125 625 3125 _____

Explain this pattern: _____

$\frac{1}{2}$ $\frac{9}{16}$ $\frac{5}{8}$ $\frac{11}{16}$ $\frac{3}{4}$ _____

Explain this pattern: _____

Now, as a family, make your own **interesting and challenging pattern** and describe it below.

Draw or write your pattern: _____

Describe your pattern: _____



Developed by Boston Excels 3.

Family Math Challenge

#5

Grades 3-5

1 5 4 8 7 11 10 14 _____

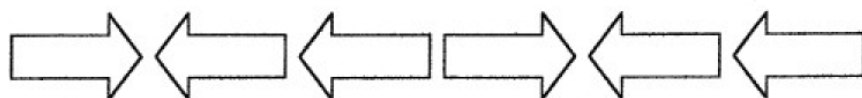
Explain this pattern: _____

HINT

In the next pattern, there is more than one right way to complete the pattern!
See what you can come up with.

a in see frog pinch stream _____

Explain this pattern: _____



Explain this pattern: _____



Developed by Boston Excels 3.

Family Math Night

Family
Handout

Patterns & Relationships

What Are Patterns & Relationships?

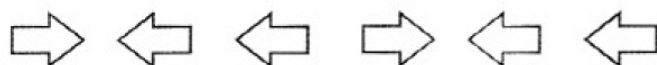
In order to solve many mathematical problems, people need to be able to identify patterns and predict what will come next if the patterns continues. Here is an example. Your daughter is saving money to buy a game she wants. She starts with \$7.00. Here is what she has saved by the end of each week.

- ☆ At the end of week 1: \$8.50
- ☆ At the end of week 2: \$10.00
- ☆ At the end of week 3: \$11.50
- ☆ At the end of week 4: \$13.00

If she continues to save at this rate, how long will it take her to save the \$25 she needs to buy the game? In order to figure out the answer, you have to see the **pattern** of how much she has saved each week so far and use it to **predict** how much she will save in the coming weeks.



This **IS** a pattern:



Can you see what the pattern is? Can you describe it to someone else? What kind of arrow would come next in the pattern?

So, have everyone in your family keep their eyes open for patterns—on wallpaper and wrapping paper, on buildings, on clothes, in music...**EVERYWHERE!**

What You Can Do at Home

Here are some things you can do at home to help your children understand patterns and relationships.

★ Make patterns with your children

You and your kids can make patterns out of anything—coins, jelly beans, blocks, or crayons and paper. The important thing to remember about a pattern is that it is **NOT JUST** a series of shapes—to be a pattern it must give enough information so that others can predict what will happen next.

This is **NOT** a pattern:



Since every shape is different, how can you know what comes next? Maybe the 5th shape will be a circle or maybe it will be a long rectangle or maybe it will be a square like the first shape!



Developed by Boston Excels

Lawrence Family Development Charter School

34 West Street, Lawrence, MA 01841

Phone: 978-689-9863 Fax: 978-689-8133

"Strengthening family . . . building community"

Parent Involvement Survey

Dear parents, teachers, and administrators:

Please help the LFDCS assess strategies for involving parents in their children's education. Parent involvement is strongly connected to improvement in:

- Student achievement
- Student attendance
- Parent-child communication
- Student attitudes and behavior.

This survey is an important component of our research and dissemination project on parent involvement. Your feedback will help us identify the most effective strategies for increasing parent involvement. The LFDCS will disseminate its findings to parents and educators through:

- A best practices manual
- A conference on enhanced parental involvement
- A website showcasing best practices

Your participation is vital. This questionnaire will take less than 15 minutes. Please complete the questionnaire promptly and return it in the self-addressed, stamped envelope to our consultant, who will compile the results. We at the LFDCS thank you for your help with this important project.

Patricia Karl, Director/Superintendent
Lawrence Family Development Charter School

***This is an anonymous survey.
Please do not put your name on this form.***

Please indicate your opinion about each strategy for increasing parent involvement by checking (✓) one box after each question.

A. Parenting Skills/Family Services

Assisting families with parenting and child-rearing skills; assisting schools in understanding families

1. A charter school should establish a resource center to provide information, materials, and resources for parents and the community.

1	Strongly Disagree
2	Slightly Disagree
3	Neither Disagree nor Agree
4	Slightly Agree
5	Strongly Agree

2. A charter school should offer courses on parenting skills.

1	Strongly Disagree
2	Slightly Disagree
3	Neither Disagree nor Agree
4	Slightly Agree
5	Strongly Agree

3. If the community has these needs, a charter school should provide families with services such as literacy skill development, ESL, citizenship education, legal aid, translation services, healthcare resources, and social services.

1	Strongly Disagree
2	Slightly Disagree
3	Neither Disagree nor Agree
4	Slightly Agree
5	Strongly Agree

4. Charter school staff should learn about the students' family culture in order to develop a productive school-family partnership.

1	Strongly Disagree
2	Slightly Disagree
3	Neither Disagree nor Agree
4	Slightly Agree
5	Strongly Agree

5. A charter school should provide hands-on workshops for parents to help them develop computer skills and the ability to use the internet.

1	Strongly Disagree
2	Slightly Disagree
3	Neither Disagree nor Agree
4	Slightly Agree
5	Strongly Agree

B. Communicating

Communicating with families about school programs and student progress

1. Each student, the student's parents, and the charter school should sign a contract stating everyone's role in the student's education.

1	Strongly Disagree
2	Slightly Disagree
3	Neither Disagree nor Agree
4	Slightly Agree
5	Strongly Agree

2. Goal-setting and a written student individualized learning plan should be completed at least once a year among student, parent, and teacher.

1	Strongly Disagree
2	Slightly Disagree
3	Neither Disagree nor Agree
4	Slightly Agree
5	Strongly Agree

3. Mandatory parent-teacher conference meetings should occur:

1	<i>Not at all</i>
2	<i>Once a year</i>
3	<i>Twice a year</i>
4	<i>Monthly</i>
5	<i>Weekly</i>

4. Written progress reports for each student should be given to parents:

1	<i>Not at all</i>
2	<i>Once a year</i>
3	<i>Twice a year</i>
4	<i>Monthly</i>
5	<i>Weekly</i>

5. A charter school should schedule curriculum nights, open houses, math/science fairs, art exhibitions, and other events inviting parents and the community to the school:

1	<i>Not at all</i>
2	<i>Once a year</i>
3	<i>Twice a year</i>
4	<i>Monthly</i>
5	<i>Weekly</i>

6. A charter school should provide parents with a news bulletin:

1	<i>Not at all</i>
2	<i>Once a year</i>
3	<i>Twice a year</i>
4	<i>Monthly</i>
5	<i>Weekly</i>

7. A charter school should schedule frequent meetings open to all parents to discuss issues and concerns:

1	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
2	<i>Slightly Disagree</i>
3	<i>Neither Disagree nor Agree</i>
4	<i>Slightly Agree</i>
5	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

8. A charter school should have regular informational meetings for parents to learn about MCAS, special education (SPED), and curriculum programs (such as math, language arts, etc.).

1	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
2	<i>Slightly Disagree</i>
3	<i>Neither Disagree nor Agree</i>
4	<i>Slightly Agree</i>
5	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

9. A charter school should have a policy to contact parents when good things happen regarding their child's academic performance, behavior, or citizenship.

1	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
2	<i>Slightly Disagree</i>
3	<i>Neither Disagree nor Agree</i>
4	<i>Slightly Agree</i>
5	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

10. A charter school should maintain a website with essential, up-to-date information.

1	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
2	<i>Slightly Disagree</i>
3	<i>Neither Disagree nor Agree</i>
4	<i>Slightly Agree</i>
5	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

11. A charter school should provide non-English speaking parents with translations during conferences and meetings and for written reports:

1	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
2	<i>Slightly Disagree</i>
3	<i>Neither Disagree nor Agree</i>
4	<i>Slightly Agree</i>
5	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

C. Volunteering

Improving recruitment, training, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and audiences to support students and school programs

1. A charter school should provide a full-time coordinator to actively encourage, nurture, and manage parent involvement:

1	Strongly Disagree
2	Slightly Disagree
3	Neither Disagree nor Agree
4	Slightly Agree
5	Strongly Agree

2. A charter school's expectations for parent involvement should be stated in a written policy:

1	Strongly Disagree
2	Slightly Disagree
3	Neither Disagree nor Agree
4	Slightly Agree
5	Strongly Agree

3. Parents should be asked for ways in which they would like to volunteer:

1	Strongly Disagree
2	Slightly Disagree
3	Neither Disagree nor Agree
4	Slightly Agree
5	Strongly Agree

4. Parents should be invited to volunteer for specific activities as needed (e.g. chaperoning, clerical help, "handyman" tasks, book fairs, cooking, fundraising, etc.):

1	Strongly Disagree
2	Slightly Disagree
3	Neither Disagree nor Agree
4	Slightly Agree
5	Strongly Agree

5. A charter school should offer training for parents to become substitute teachers:

1	Strongly Disagree
2	Slightly Disagree
3	Neither Disagree nor Agree
4	Slightly Agree
5	Strongly Agree

6. A charter school should utilize parents' expertise to teach enrichment workshops, provide career examples, develop internships for students, become reading or writing mentors, etc.:

1	Strongly Disagree
2	Slightly Disagree
3	Neither Disagree nor Agree
4	Slightly Agree
5	Strongly Agree

D. Learning at Home

Involving families with their children in learning activities at home

1. A charter school should give parents information about how to help their children with homework:

1	Strongly Disagree
2	Slightly Disagree
3	Neither Disagree nor Agree
4	Slightly Agree
5	Strongly Agree

2. A charter school should offer workshops to teach parents specific strategies to help their children learn:

1	Strongly Disagree
2	Slightly Disagree
3	Neither Disagree nor Agree
4	Slightly Agree
5	Strongly Agree

3. A charter school should provide each student with an assignment book for recording daily assignments that can also be reviewed and signed by parents:

1	Strongly Disagree
2	Slightly Disagree
3	Neither Disagree nor Agree
4	Slightly Agree
5	Strongly Agree

4. A charter school should make daily homework assignments accessible to parents by phone, e-mail, or through the school website:

1	Strongly Disagree
2	Slightly Disagree
3	Neither Disagree nor Agree
4	Slightly Agree
5	Strongly Agree

E. Decision Making

Including families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy

1. For important school policy decisions, *parents should be:*

1	<i>The sole decision-makers</i>
2	<i>The majority on all important decision-making committees</i>
3	<i>Equal partners with the educators and administrators</i>
4	<i>Asked for input, but should not make the decisions</i>
5	<i>Parent input is not necessary on these types of decisions</i>

2. For important financial decisions, *parents should be:*

1	<i>The sole decision-makers</i>
2	<i>The majority on all important decision-making committees</i>
3	<i>Equal partners with the educators and administrators</i>
4	<i>Asked for input, but should not make the decisions</i>
5	<i>Parent input is not necessary on these types of decisions</i>

3. In decisions about curriculum development, *parents should be:*

1	<i>The sole decision-makers</i>
2	<i>The majority on all important decision-making committees</i>
3	<i>Equal partners with the educators and administrators</i>
4	<i>Asked for input, but should not make the decisions</i>
5	<i>Parent input is not necessary on these types of decisions</i>

4. In hiring new teachers, *parents should be:*

1	<i>The sole decision-makers</i>
2	<i>The majority on all important decision-making committees</i>
3	<i>Equal partners with the educators and administrators</i>
4	<i>Asked for input, but should not make the decisions</i>
5	<i>Parent input is not necessary on these types of decisions</i>

5. In the formal evaluation of teachers and staff, *parents should be:*

1	<i>The sole decision-makers</i>
2	<i>The majority on all important decision-making committees</i>
3	<i>Equal partners with the educators and administrators</i>
4	<i>Asked for input, but should not make the decisions</i>
5	<i>Parent input is not necessary on these types of decisions</i>

6. A charter school should train parents to participate in governing the school:

1	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
2	<i>Slightly Disagree</i>
3	<i>Neither Disagree nor Agree</i>
4	<i>Slightly Agree</i>
5	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

F. Collaborating with the Community

Coordinating resources and services for families, students, and the school with business, agencies, and other groups to provide services for the community

1. A charter school should partner with citizens and agencies to provide specialized learning opportunities for students (e.g. artists-in-residence, drama coaches, after-school activities, mentors, internships, homework clubs, etc.):

1	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
2	<i>Slightly Disagree</i>
3	<i>Neither Disagree nor Agree</i>
4	<i>Slightly Agree</i>
5	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

2. A charter school should organize frequent events that bring together parents, the school, businesses, and other organizations to provide services for the community at large:

1	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
2	<i>Slightly Disagree</i>
3	<i>Neither Disagree nor Agree</i>
4	<i>Slightly Agree</i>
5	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

3. Community services should be an important component of each student's learning experiences:

1	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
2	<i>Slightly Disagree</i>
3	<i>Neither Disagree nor Agree</i>
4	<i>Slightly Agree</i>
5	<i>Strongly Agree</i>

The Lawrence Family Development Charter School is planning a conference on effective ways of involving parents in their children's education. The conference will be open to educators and parents. Your answers to the following questions will help select the workshops offered at the conference.

1. Briefly describe parent involvement strategies that work well at your school. Explain why each strategy is successful:

2. Check all obstacles to parent involvement in your school: *(Check all that apply.)*

- | | |
|----|--|
| 1 | Lack of parent interest |
| 2 | School staff resistance |
| 3 | Parents do not have enough time |
| 4 | Staff do not have enough time |
| 5 | Lack of information about how parents can be involved |
| 6 | Language barriers |
| 7 | Anxiety about contacting school |
| 8 | No one is available to coordinate or organize parent involvement |
| 9 | Other (write in): |
| 10 | There are no obstacles |

3. Please check all the topics below that you would be interested in learning more about at the conference organized by the Lawrence Family Development Charter School:

- | | |
|----|--|
| 1 | <i>Designing successful materials/workshops to help parents improve parenting skills</i> |
| 2 | <i>Understanding cultural differences and their effect on parent involvement</i> |
| 3 | <i>Designing and staffing an effective Parent or Family Center</i> |
| 4 | <i>Establishing partnerships with community agencies to expand services to families</i> |
| 5 | <i>Strengthening the family/school partnership through the use of social services</i> |
| 6 | <i>Implementing individualized educational contracts in collaboration with families</i> |
| 7 | <i>Helping parents and staff define the role of homework</i> |
| 8 | <i>Tracking and reporting student progress/performance</i> |
| 9 | <i>Helping staff and parents work effectively together</i> |
| 10 | <i>Designing a database of parent volunteer interests/expertise</i> |
| 11 | <i>Training parents as enrichment teachers and/or substitute teachers</i> |
| 12 | <i>Training parents to share in school governance</i> |
| 13 | <i>Designing events that bring the community into the school</i> |
| 14 | <i>Designing an easily maintainable website</i> |
| 15 | <i>Designing community service programs for students</i> |
| 16 | <i>Developing successful internship programs for students</i> |
| 17 | <i>Devising effective fundraising strategies using parent volunteers</i> |
| 18 | <i>Other (write in):</i> |

Additional Information:

1. Please check all that apply to you:

- | | |
|---|----------------------|
| 1 | <i>Parent</i> |
| 2 | <i>Teacher</i> |
| 3 | <i>Staff Member</i> |
| 4 | <i>Administrator</i> |

2. Are you:

- | | |
|---|---------------|
| 1 | <i>Male</i> |
| 2 | <i>Female</i> |

3. How long have you had a child at this charter school:

- | | |
|---|---------------------------|
| 1 | <i>Not applicable</i> |
| 2 | <i>First year</i> |
| 3 | <i>Second year</i> |
| 4 | <i>Third year</i> |
| 5 | <i>Fourth year</i> |
| 6 | <i>Fifth year or more</i> |

4. Your child or children are enrolled in which grades at this charter school: (Check all that apply.)

- | | | | |
|---|-------------------------|----|-----------------------|
| 1 | <i>Not Applicable</i> | 9 | <i>Sixth Grade</i> |
| 2 | <i>Pre-kindergarten</i> | 10 | <i>Seventh Grade</i> |
| 3 | <i>Kindergarten</i> | 11 | <i>Eighth Grade</i> |
| 4 | <i>First Grade</i> | 12 | <i>Ninth Grade</i> |
| 5 | <i>Second Grade</i> | 13 | <i>Tenth Grade</i> |
| 6 | <i>Third Grade</i> | 14 | <i>Eleventh Grade</i> |
| 7 | <i>Fourth Grade</i> | 15 | <i>Twelfth Grade</i> |
| 8 | <i>Fifth Grade</i> | | |

5. How long have you worked at this charter school:

- | | |
|---|---------------------------|
| 1 | <i>Not applicable</i> |
| 2 | <i>First year</i> |
| 3 | <i>Second year</i> |
| 4 | <i>Third year</i> |
| 5 | <i>Fourth year</i> |
| 6 | <i>Fifth year or more</i> |

6. Did you attend school:

- | | |
|---|----------------------------------|
| 1 | Inside the U.S. |
| 2 | Outside the U.S. |
| 3 | Both inside and outside the U.S. |

8. What is the primary language spoken at home?
(Write in.)

--

7. What is the highest school level you have completed:

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------|
| 1 | Elementary school (K-8) |
| 2 | High school or Secondary school |
| 3 | Some college course work |
| 4 | A 2-year college degree |
| 5 | A 4-year college degree |
| 6 | Graduate School |

9. How do you describe yourself? (Select one or more responses.)

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 | American Indian or Alaskan Native |
| 2 | Asian |
| 3 | Black or African American |
| 4 | Hispanic or Latino |
| 5 | Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander |
| 6 | White |
| 7 | Other (write in): |

10. Please write in the name of your charter school _____.

*This information will help us minimize duplicate mailings.
All responses will be completely anonymous.*

Thank you very much for your cooperation!

Please return this questionnaire in the self-addressed, stamped envelope to:

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apsler@gis.net