



South Dakota Guide to
**Inspiring Partnerships
Between Home & School**

South Dakota Guide to Inspiring Partnerships Between Home and School

Table of Contents

Navigating the home and school connection

“Can your school be so welcoming, so inviting, and so comfortable that every person who walks through our doors believes they are about to have an amazing experience?” Douglas Fisher, Nancy Frey, and Ian Pumpian

Introduction to SD Guide to Parent and Family Engagement

Why Is It Important?.....	Page 4
What Is the South Dakota Guide and Toolkit For Parent and Family Engagement?	
How To Use The South Dakota Guide and Toolkit.	

Section 1: Getting Started!

Family Friendly Walk Through.....Page 6

Why Is It Important?	
What Is A Family Friendly Walk Through (FFWT)?	
Who Is Involved?	
How To Conduct A FFWT?	
The FFWT Report.	

Vision and Mission Statements.....Page 9

Why Is It Important?	
What Is A Vision And Mission Statement?	
Who Is Involved?	
How To Develop A Vision/Mission For Family Engagement.	

District/School Policies and Compacts

Title I District Policy for Parent and Family Engagement.....Page 10

Why Is It important?	
What Is A District Policy On Parent And Family Engagement?	
Who Is Involved?	
How To Develop A Comprehensive District Policy On Parent And Family Engagement.	

Title I School Policy/Compact for Parent and Family Engagement.....Page 11

Why Is It Important?	
What Is A School Policy?	
Title I School/Parent Compact.	
Who Is Involved?	
What is a School/Parent Compact?	
How To Develop A School Level Compact On Parent An Family Engagement.	

Making Connections.....Page 12

Section 2: Physical Environment

Physical Environment.....Page 14
 Why Is It Important?
 What Is It?
 How To Create And Maintain A Welcoming Physical Environment.
Physical Safety.....Page 14
A Welcoming Principal.....Page 15
Making Connections.....Page 16

Section 3: School-Wide Practices

School-Wide Practices.....Page 17
 Why Is It Important?
 What Is It?
 How To Establish And Support Positive School-Wide Practices?
Making Connections.....Page 19

Section 4: Communication

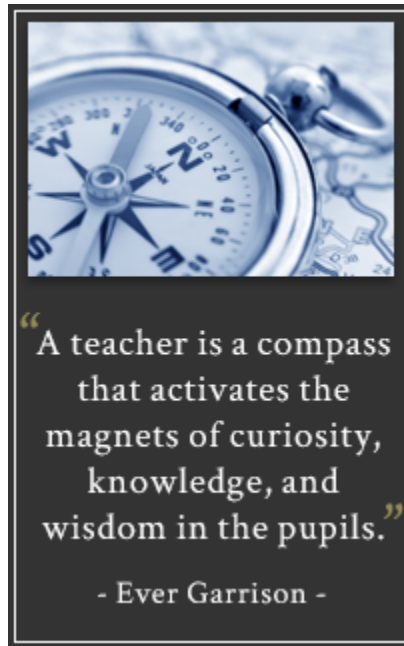
Communication.....Page 22
 Why Is It Important?
 What Is It?
 How To Establish And Maintain Effective Communication With Parents And Families.
Choose Communication Tools That Work.....Page 22
Ideas For Communicating With Hard-to-Reach Parents And Families.....Page 26
Ideas For Reaching Out To Parents And Families of English Language Learners...Page 27
Handling The Tough Conversations With Care.....Page 27
Open House/Back To School Events.....Page 27
Parent-Teacher Conferences.....Page 28
Communication About Attendance.....Page 29
Transition.....Page 29
 Transition Into Kindergarten
 Transition Into Middle School
 Transition Into High School
 Transition Into College/Career
Making Connections.....Page 30

Section 5: Learning Practices – Bringing It Home

Learning Practices – Bringing it Home.....Page 32
 Why Is It Important?

What Is It?	
How to Help Families to Support Learning at Home.	
The Love of Reading Starts At Home	Page 32
Linking To Learning	Page 33
Building Relationships	Page 33
Homework	Page 34
Curriculum Of The Home	Page 34
Talking To Parents And Families About Content Standards	Page 35
Sharing Academic And Developmental Goals	Page 35
Sustaining Your Efforts	Page 35
Helping Parents and Families To Understand Data	Page 36
Why Is It Important?	
What Is It?	
How to Share Data Effectively.	
Making Connections	Page 37
 References	

Introduction to the South Dakota Guide to Parent and Family Engagement



Why it is important?

Parent and family engagement is not a new concept or idea. Over 50 years of research links the variety of roles that parents play in their child’s education – as encouragers of learning, building resolve and determination, and advocating for the education of their child. Simply stated, parent and family engagement plays a critical role in student success and achievement. Parent and family engagement has a sustained and systemic effect on learning outcomes for children. The SD Guide to Parent and Family Engagement is your navigation tool for establishing and maintaining meaningful and trusting partnerships with parents and families.

What is parent and family engagement?

Parents and families support their child’s learning by guiding them through the school system, modeling learning and enthusiasm for education, monitoring their child’s time, behavior, establishing boundaries, and collaborating with educators and members of the larger community. Parents and families raise their children in multiple settings and across their child’s lifespan.

Parent and family engagement is a shared responsibility between families, schools and other community agencies and organizations. Parent and family engagement should be focused on those activities that are linked to a child’s learning at home, at school, and in the community

and honor the active, multiple, and different ways that children learn and develop from cradle to career.


How to use the guide and toolkit?

This guide and toolkit were designed based on the fact that educators need tools! It is intended to provide educators with the capacity, confidence, and the understanding necessary to engage in partnerships that will support student achievement and learning.

The guide has five different sections that focus on different aspects of engaging parents and families.

- Getting Started
- Physical Environment
- School-wide Practices
- Communication
- Learning Practices – Bringing It Home

Sections 1-5 of this guide and the related tools in the toolkit are connected to the related domains from the SD Framework for Effective Principals and Charlotte Danielson’s Framework for Teaching.

A  compass icon in a section indicates a best practice idea.



At the end of each section there is a link to the “tools” available in that section of the toolkit. The tools found in each toolkit section are varied. They might be a link to a website, a parent handout/flyer on a specific topic, an article on a specific topic, a video, examples, and educator resources/materials. It is hoped that the tools found in the toolkit will be used by educators to connect with parents and families and help families to support their child’s academic growth and development.

There will be an ongoing collection of ideas and resources used by educators and administrators in the schools across South Dakota to be added to the toolkit. If you would like to contribute an idea or suggestion related to parent and family engagement please send an email to Dawn Smith DawnL.Smith@state.sd.us at the SD Department of Education.

Section 1

Getting Started!

Family Friendly Walk Through

Why is it important?

Parents and family members must feel welcome in order for them to fully participate in the education of their children. When families feel welcome – they feel like they belong to the school and the school belongs to them. This sense helps parents to become more active in their child’s education. Research has shown that the families who are actively involved with the school, who have built a relationship with teachers and administrators, and who volunteer at least three times in the school year; their children perform significantly higher on tests, have improved attendance and behavior and life skills.

Ideas and suggestions obtained during the FFWT will help you and your school to welcome families into the educational system and to create and build family centered policies and compacts that will impact the social and academic outcomes for students through increased family engagement.

What is a Family Friendly Walk Through?

The Family Friendly Walk Through (FFWT) is a tool designed by the SD Department of Education to provide schools the opportunity to meet as a team in order to identify ways in which the school can create a more welcoming environment for families. Parents, including parents of children with disabilities, community members, school board members, educators, and administrators are asked to consider looking at the school through the lenses of all of the families who attend that school. This process can provide you and your school with a lot of great information and ideas. The Family Friendly Walk Through can be facilitated by a building principal, a lead teacher, a School Support Team Member and/or staff from the South Dakota Department of Education upon capacity. The Family Friendly Walk-Through will provide ideas and strategies that will make the school more inviting and welcoming to families and community members.

Who is involved?

A team of people conduct the FFWT. The team should include parents/family members, school staff, a school board member, community, or a business representative. It is important that parents make up the majority of the team. (If there are 2-3 school staff participating there

should be 4-6 parents/family members!). A “parent” is defined as someone whose only connection with the school is that they have a child who attends that school! (A secretary of a school might also be a parent of a child in that school – but for this process, they would be considered school staff.)



The FFWT is most effective when there are between 6 and 10 members participating. This will ensure a variety of input and ideas. It is important to consider the demographics of your school and include all families that are represented in the school population. Examples include: a parent new to the district/school, an English Learner parent, a parent of a kindergarten student.

How to conduct a FFWT!

A FFWT can take between 3-4 hours to conduct depending on the size of the school and team. A family/educator survey is an important part of this process and is completed prior to the actual Walk Through. The surveys are connected to each of the checklists and allow for all of the families/educators in the school to participate in the process!

The discussion between all participants is the key to the success of the FFWT process! The facilitator should ensure that everyone feels comfortable and engaged in this process. Here are the easy steps for facilitating a successful FFWT:

- Team members gather in a comfortable meeting area of the school.
- Introductions are made (nametags always a great idea!)
- Review the Participant Instructions with the team.
- Have the principal explain their vision/mission for family engagement at their school and how the FFWT might help.
- Distribute checklist packet.
- Prior to the start of each checklist allow some time for participants to read through and consider their responses to the information on the checklist.
- The physical environment is the first checklist completed.
 - This checklist is completed as the team takes a tour of the school building and exterior areas.
 - TAKE GOOD NOTES WHILE ON TOUR! Feel free to ask questions and prompt discussion with team.
 - Some of the discussion during the tour might relate to another checklist – be sure to record this information.
 - After the tour distribute the educator/parent survey results and have the group look at results of questions associated with this checklist.

- Have the team identify commendations/recommendations based upon their tour and discussion.
- Complete the other section checklists (School-wide Practices, Communication and Learning Practices, Written Communication and Technology)
 - Remember to allow time for participants to read section's checklist
 - Ask questions and encourage discussion
 - Review survey results with each section (questions related to each checklist noted at bottom of page).
- When the team has finished all of the checklists ask the group to prioritize and identify a couple of things to focus on. Ask the group to identify some "next steps". Where to start? Consider identifying a couple of items that could be done easily but also set a larger goal/plan of action for implementation. Be sure to include time frames and the person responsible for completing any action.

Please contact SD Department of Education, Title Programs for assistance in arranging a Family Friendly Walk Through by calling 605-773-6400.

Family Friendly Walk Through Report

After the FFWT checklists have been completed and the team has identified some next steps – it is important to share the information collected. The facilitator of the FFWT can use the FFWT report form to organize the information. Share the report with school staff, families, your school board, and community members.

Vision and Mission Statements

“Vision statement: Imagine every student inspired, challenged, and cared for by exceptional educators. Imagine your family welcomed, respected, and valued by exceptional schools. Imagine our community united, strengthened, and prepared for an exceptional future.

St. Paul Public Schools: Where imagine meets destination.

Mission statement: To provide a premier education for all”

St Paul Public Schools; St Paul, MN

Vision/Mission Statements

Why it is important?

Vision/Mission statements help focus on what is really important. The school districts written parent and family engagement policy/plan must establish the district’s expectations for parental involvement – the vision of the district. A vision/mission statement will set the course for promoting and honoring parent and family engagement in your school. Your vision and mission statement will help staff, parents and families, and the community know that your district values the active and meaningful involvement of parents and families and your goal of creating effective and meaningful partnerships.

What is it?

Your vision statement should inspire people to dream; your mission statement should inspire them to action. Mission statements are similar to vision statements, in that they, too, look at the big picture. However, they're more concrete, and they are definitely more "action-oriented" than vision statements. These statements should welcome, value, and encourage parent and family engagement that focuses on the goal of producing academic excellence and positive, productive life outcomes!

How to develop a vision and mission statement for parent and family engagement.

Not only do the statements themselves serve as a constant reminder of what is important, the process of developing them allows people to see the school as "theirs." Its common sense: people will believe in something more completely if they had a hand in developing it. Be sure your vision and mission statements are easily visible (for example, are these on the letterhead of your stationary or website), families can learn about your school without having to work hard for the information. Clearly, this can be very helpful when you are building partnerships with others in the community.

District/School Policies and Compacts

Title I District Policy for Parent and Family Engagement

Why it is important?

The school district's written parent and family engagement policy/plan must establish the district's expectations for parental involvement – the vision of the district. Every district that receives Title I funds must have a written DISTRICT policy for parent and family engagement. Districts must develop system-wide policies and practices that welcome families, bridge class and culture, incorporate parents' ideas, and promote collaboration on improving student achievement.

What is a district policy for parent and family engagement?

This policy commits the district to certain actions and comprehensively describes how the district will support Title I schools in working with parents and families. The policy is developed with the active involvement of parents and families. This policy must establish the district's expectations and objectives (purpose, target, and goal) for meaningful parent and family engagement.

Who is involved?

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) requires involvement of parents and family members when jointly developing the plan. A team of stakeholders that is representative of the people who will implement the policy, including parents and families, should work together to develop a district policy.

How to develop a meaningful district level policy for family engagement.

Parent and family engagement matters to student achievement! An effective policy should take action to create a culture of partnership across the district by setting high standards and expectations for district and school staff related to engaging all parents and families. Your policy should be directly connected to your district's school improvement initiative to focus efforts on improving academic achievement. In the development of your district policy be sure to encompass ALL families and identify any barriers that might exist for participation.

Building capacity is essential. At the district level it will ensure that there is a solid structure of supports so that all schools can develop strong family-school-community partnerships. Capacity building also requires effective professional development at all levels including building leadership, educational staff, and establishing the roles and responsibilities for families so there is engagement at every level.

Title I School Level Policy for Parent and Family Engagement

Why is it important?

The policy commits a school to certain goals and actions. A school level policy/plan on parent and family engagement should describe effective partnerships between the school and its families, and identify how this will be implemented. A school level policy is also a requirement in ESEA and must be developed with meaningful input from parents and families and distributed to all families served under Title I.

What is a School level policy for parent and family engagement?

Each school served under Title I shall jointly develop with and distribute to parents and families a school policy on parent and family engagement. The school level policy must focus on improving student achievement. An annual meeting must occur (along with as many other meetings as necessary to obtain parent and family input). The policy should be used as a plan to guide how the school will welcome and engage parents and families in student learning and growth. The policy establishes family friendly conditions and encourages working as partners with families to help all students learn to high levels.

Who is involved?

A team of stakeholders that is representative of the people who will implement the policy, including parents and families, should work together to develop the school policy.

How to develop a school policy on parent and family involvement

- Bring together an action team that represents the people who will carry out the policy, including parent leaders who reflect the diverse families in the school.
- Find out how families and school staff want to work together to improve achievement. What they are interested in doing and learning about? What supports do they need? Focus groups, surveys, and interviews are good ways to do this.
- Revise the existing policy to respond to current needs and interest. Focus on action-what needs to happen and when.

Title I School-Parent Compact

Why is it important?

The purpose a school-parent compact is to help educators, parents and families come to a consensus on the responsibilities of the individuals influencing student's achievement. The underlying assumption is that a student's academic success will improve when home and school work together.

What is a Title I School-Parent compact?

A school-parent compact is an agreement between parents, teachers, and students. The compact clarifies how schools and families can support children's growth and development. The compact outlines how the stakeholder groups will work together to boost student achievement. Research shows that "parent and community ties" can have a systemic and sustained effort on learning outcomes for children and on whole school improvement when combined with other essential supports. Strong leadership, qualified faculty, community engagement and partnerships, a student centered learning climate, and effective instructional guidance for staff contribute to the overall success of school and school communities.

How to develop a school-parent compact.

When developing a school-parent-student compact get buy in from all and explain what the compact is. The compact is about families and schools and how the school will help families to support learning. The compact is NOT a one shot deal. The intent of the compact is to build partnerships that will support learning. It's an alliance between school and home.

When developing the compact choose someone with leadership skills to lead the project. Choose someone who **believes** in this work! If you don't already know, ask who is interested in working with families. If you have an after school program think about how the staff can be included. Include families and students (when age appropriate) in the development of the compact.

The compact outlines **how** parents, the entire school staff, and students will share the responsibility for improved student academic achievement. Ensure Information is in a language that families can understand.



Consider creating grade level compacts! This will allow provide parents with more specific information related to their child's educational goals for the year.

Making Connections

Leadership is Key to Creating Strong Relationships Among Families, Parents, and Community

When school principals believe in their leadership capacity and view families as partners in their school and community they are on the path to engaging parents and families. In order for family and community engagement to be successful the administration will need to build relationships between family members, community members, school staff and students.

Relationships cannot exist without trust. At the heart of most disengagement is a lack of trust between families and school personnel. Trust allows for actions that are otherwise not possible.

When parents and families are truly engaged in the school community and understand the vision and mission of their schools they have a vested interest in the educational process of their child. When the administration includes parents in this process, parents and families become partners in the school and view themselves as equal partners.

South Dakota Framework for Effective Principals

Domain 1: Vision and Goals

Principals and assistant principals shall demonstrate the ability to guide the development and implementation of a shared vision, mission, and goal for the school.



Link to Section 1 of the SD TOOLKIT for Parent and Family Engagement.

If you would like to contribute an idea or suggestion related parent and family engagement please send an email to Dawn Smith DawnL.Smith@state.sd.us at the SD Department of Education.

Section 2

Physical Environment

“School is a building with four walls which has the future in it”. Lon Watters

Why is it important?

A well-maintained and safe physical environment fosters students’ ability to learn, to show improved achievement scores, and to exhibit appropriate behavior. An individual student does not enroll in school – the student is a part of a family! When families feel welcomed it provides them with a sense of being a part of the school and is an important part of building successful partnerships with families.

What is it?

A welcoming, safe, and supportive physical environment is necessary for the academic success of children. This encompasses everything from the maintenance and upkeep of the school building and grounds, to the school entrance, to the condition of school hallways and common spaces, and into individual classrooms. The physical environment of the school speaks to the contribution that safe, clean, and comfortable surroundings make to a positive school climate in which students can learn.

How to create and maintain a welcoming physical environment.

Here are some simple things that you can do to ensure your school is welcoming to parents and families!

- Be sure the primary entrance is well marked!
- Ensure the exterior of the school is well lit and free of litter.
- Have reserved parking spots for families and visitors who are visiting the school.
- Place a welcome sign at your front door!
- Create signs and directions that make navigating your school easy for all. Are there signs written in the languages spoken by your English Learner (EL) students and families?
- Consider having visitors and families fill out a service response card before they leave. Ask questions such as: Did you find what you were looking for? Were you treated respectfully? Did our staff help you? Did you get the information you needed? Please feel free to write a comment on the back of this card.

Physical Safety

Families want their children safe! They are aware of and fully support the need for schools to create an environment that is safe. A safe school allows all students to thrive and engage in learning without the distraction and worry about physical safety. Here are some ideas to ensure that families feel that their presence is valued and welcomed.

- Be sure to explain safety procedures to families. Inform them of changes to security systems and how to access the school in accordance with safe policies.
- State and/or federal rules require or restrict schools in certain things; for example, student work displays might be considered a fire hazard. Be sure to inform families about these requirements. A link to state required drills is located in the toolkit.
- Place school staff in high traffic areas to ensure safety of students. Pick up and drop off times can be especially confusing and chaotic. Consider the development of a plan for traffic control for drop off/pick up time. Some schools have even established different times of release for students, such as releasing the younger students 5 minutes early to decrease confusion and increase safety.
- All school staff should be made aware of who has permission to pick up students.



Welcome Signs! Have welcome signs that represent the different cultures and languages of the children and families who attend your school.



Family Resource Room

Consider identifying a space that can be used as a family resource center. A family resource room/family center is typically located within the schools they serve. It can be located in an unused classroom, hallway, and converted storage space. Optimally, there would be places for families to gather to have small meetings and develop personal relationships with each other and school staff.

A family resource room is a great place to have books and videos on topics of interest to families; a computer that could be used to monitor their child's progress via online systems, writing a resume, to searching for community resources/information.

A Welcoming Principal!

A school principal plays a significant role in setting a welcoming tone across the school. Here are some ideas on helping all families to feel comfortable and "at home" at the school

- Respect parents and focus on the positive. When parents visit your schools – start from a place of respect and appreciation. Parents of children who struggle can often feel guilty or ashamed. Counter this by focusing on the positive. Approach challenges by asking, "What can we do to solve this problem together?" This sets a tone of collaboration.
- Support ALL levels of participation. At some schools, there are only a few ways for parents to be involved. This can create a situation in which a small group of highly visible, highly vocal parents can dominate and other parents seem to be forgotten. Parents who are less outspoken, whose time is more limited, or who are overwhelmed by their vocal peers need to be validated and honored. Every parent's circumstances are different. Start with the assumption that ALL parents care deeply about education and their children's success.

- Make it clear that parents are welcome by opening the doors and inviting parents and families into the school. Have regular visitation days for prospective students and their families, new families to the area, or families whose first child will be entering school.
- Be accessible and available. It is easy to say, “Parents and families are welcome and valued at my school.” It is a different thing to show it! (And families can tell the difference.) Take the time to speak with parents.
- Be a familiar face in the classroom. A principal plays a key role in setting a tone. It takes extra time for that welcoming tone to flow from the principal’s office into teacher’s classrooms. Help your staff to trust and share your vision for family engagement by being a familiar face and regular visitor in different classrooms.

Making Connections:

Leadership is Key to Creating Strong Relationships Among Families, Parents, and Community

When school principals believe in their leadership capacity and view families as partners in their school and community they are on the path to engaging parents and families. In order for family and community engagement to be successful the administration will need to build relationships between family members, community members, school staff and students.

Relationships cannot exist without trust. At the heart of most disengagement is a lack of trust between families and school personnel. Trust allows for actions that are otherwise not possible.

The role of a school administrator comes with many responsibilities one of which is creating and supporting a safe learning environment. When parents and families see school leaders participating in their child’s everyday activities they develop a respect and trust for them as leaders.

South Dakota Framework for Effective Principals Domain 4:
Principals and assistant principals shall demonstrate the ability to communicate with staff and review research and data to promote a school culture and instructional program that foster student learning for students, staff, and community.

Charlotte Danielson’s Framework for Teaching Domain 2: The Classroom Environment



Link to Section 2 of the SD TOOLKIT for Parent and Family Engagement.

If you would like to contribute an idea or suggestion related parent and family engagement please send an email to Dawn Smith DawnL.Smith@state.sd.us at the SD Department of Education.

Section 3

School-wide Practices

“If kids come to us from strong, healthy functioning families, it makes our job easier, if they do not come to us from strong, healthy, functioning families, it makes our job more important” Barbara Colorose

Why is it important?

Every family who sends their child to school wants them to succeed at school and in life. Families may act or say things that cause teachers and school staff to assume that they don't respect the importance of education. Positive school practices respect parents and families and recognize the critical role they play in the educational success of their child. First, consider our own mindset - what do we think and believe about families and the role they play in education?

Research has shown that there are four core beliefs that educators must embrace in order to build genuine and supportive partnerships with parents and families. The first core belief is the most important as it addresses our assumptions about families. This belief is, **“All parents have dreams for their children and want the best for them”**. The key to this belief is all means ALL! The role for educators is to show families how to support those dreams by supporting learning at home and talking about and actively planning for their child's futures.

The second core belief, **“All parents have the capacity to support their children's learning”**, speaks to the fact that the funds of knowledge, talents, and life experiences parents and families have provide them with the capacity for assisting their children with the ability to support school skills. Schools need to help families understand how this knowledge will benefit their child.

What are School-wide Practices?

Positive school-wide practices encompass those ways in which all school staff demonstrate their willingness and ability to work and partner with families. Most will generally agree that a family-school partnership is important, but it is also easy to identify barriers that are impossible to overcome. Positive school-wide practices include having great “customer” service in the front office, friendly and helpful staff, and recognition and appreciation of the different cultures in the school.

How to establish and support positive school-wide practices.

First impressions matter! Family members or visitors walking in the door should be greeted in a warm and friendly way. The building principal should be available, and visible throughout the school building and grounds; and accessible to staff, students, and families. Parents and

families are more willing to support their child's learning when they are welcomed, invited, and supported by teachers and staff.

The front office staff are a key factor in effective and welcoming school-wide practices. In most school buildings, the main office serves as a hub around which all other activities revolve. It is often said with a smile that the office folks really "run the show".

As the school's public face, each day the front office staff greets dozens of parents, community members, and other visitors; communicates with most of the staff; and answers countless phone calls. For that reason, it is of critical importance that the office atmosphere and layout establish a welcoming tone. No matter how well your office space is set up, the main ingredient for a successful office experience for parents, families, and other visitors is to have the right people working there. A parent's impression of a school, for better or worse, is often formed by their office interactions. If you are greeted warmly and promptly, then your overall mindset toward the school is more positive.

There are four core beliefs that are the foundation of the work of engaging parents and families. The first two beliefs were identified and explained in the above "Why" section. The third core belief states, **"Parents and school staff should be equal partners."** What this means is that the relationships between school staff and parents/families are routinely built on a lopsided power base. Most parents and families perceive the school staff as "professionals". After all – the principal and teacher have the authority to make rules, provide discipline, and make classroom assignments. As a parent or family member many feel that they should only come to school when asked. This is especially true of parents and families of different cultures, racial, and class backgrounds. What this belief means is that everyone needs to start out with the idea that everyone has something to offer. This is all about building the capacity of BOTH educators and parents to successfully increase student achievement and growth.

Creating a school climate and culture that supports partnerships with parents and families requires commitment from the staff and leadership from the principal. The fourth core belief, **"The responsibility for building partnerships between school and home rests primarily with school staff, especially school leaders"**. Strong leadership is essential to create a climate and culture that supports partnerships with parents and families. The building principal plays a key role, but educators must also advocate for family engagement. It is far easier for educators to reach out to parents and family than it is for family members to "reach in" to the school, especially when parents or families might already feel intimidated by the power and authority of the school. Educators will be more willing to engage parents and families when they have the support of their colleagues. They are confident about their own abilities to engage families and understand that helping parents and families support their child's learning is their responsibility.



Celebrating Cultures

South Dakota as a state is becoming more diverse each year. As the demographics of our state change, these changes are reflected in the children who attend our schools. It is important that we all appreciate and celebrate the different cultures within our schools. When staff understand the values and traditions of different cultures, they can better meet the needs of these students of diverse homes. Inviting families to share information about their cultures at different events is a way to educate staff members and helps in building a strong relationship with these families. Here are some ideas to recognize and celebrate the different cultures at your school.

- Create a program to celebrate families on a continuous basis, weekly, monthly, etc.
- Have a cultural fair before or during the school year in which all families participate and share some of the traditions of their country/region including such as food, dress, holiday traditions, and other customs.
- Designate a bulletin board or hallway as a family celebration area.
- Invite family members to visit the school and talk with the class about their jobs, their home country, and other areas of interest.

Familiarize teachers to the many different cultures that attend your school. Encourage staff members to actively engage in activities held within the community where students will be participating. Let parents and families see you engaging within their culture and traditions.

- Introduce families to other families who have children in the same grade, same interests and encourage them to communicate with one another throughout the school year.
- Take the staff members on a field trip throughout your community and expose them to the diverse student population, social-economic conditions and the dynamics that make up the school community.
 - Consider having a parent or family member who is already comfortable with the school staff and ask them to be the tour guide. They will be able to provide valuable information about the various ethnic groups and their culture.
 - It will make a statement to families that come from these diverse areas that you do want to bridge the gap between home and school. That you are making an effort to reach out and connect with the families of the students that attend your school.

Promote a culture of acceptance, communication, and value toward all families.



Have your own “Welcome Wagon” that visits new families! Make an appointment with the families and have a small group or liaison visit the family several days after enrollment to answer any questions the family may now have that they didn’t have at the time of enrollment.



Consider the development of a welcome packet for new families or families of children entering kindergarten. Some items to include could be:

- School brochure and/or handbook that are displayed at local businesses
- School contact information (website, phone numbers, administrators and school counselors.
- PTA information or parent liaison contact information
- A gift, school calendar, shirt, pen, school sticker
- Maps to school and where to find doors

Making Connections:

When school principals believe in their leadership capacity and view families as partners in their school and community they are on the path to engaging parents and families. In order for family and community engagement to be successful the administration will need to build relationships between family members, community members, school staff and students.

Relationships cannot exist without trust. At the heart of most disengagement is a lack of trust between families and school personnel. Trust allows for actions that are otherwise not possible.

Administrators are faced with an ever changing and diverse population of families and students. Knowing these families at a deeper level creates and fosters a sense of community, belonging, and strength of community among the parents and families and the school. When families and parents recognize their cultures and beliefs are valued, they feel honored and the path for a partnership has begun.

South Dakota Framework for Effective Principals
 Domain 6 Ethical and Cultural Leadership
 Principals and assistant principals shall demonstrate the ability to provide ethical, cultural, and skilled leadership

Charlotte Danielson’s Framework for Teaching
 Domain 1: Planning and Preparation



Link to Section 3 of the SD TOOLKIT for Parent and Family Engagement.

If you would like to contribute an idea or suggestion related parent and family engagement please send an email to Dawn Smith DawnL.Smith@state.sd.us at the SD Department of Education.

Section 4

Communication

Sara Lawrence Lightfoot author of the book, *“The Essential Conversation”* learned from interviews that we all bring ghosts of past school experiences. If we are successful in building respectful and trusting relationships, we can name our ghosts and move beyond them to establish genuine two way communication that supports student learning.

Why is it important?

When we listen to and learn from families, incorporate their cultural and linguistic funds of knowledge in curriculum, and develop with families ways they can be actively involved in their children’s education at home, we go beyond the good intentions of school-to-home communications and enter into meaningful dialogue that can lead to student learning and growth. Schools can establish meaningful home–school dialogue when they expand “communication” to include more than routine practice and, whenever possible, tailor their communication to individual families.

What is effective communication?

Effective communication typically is two-way. Two-way communication is the exchange of information from school-to-home but also from home-to-school. Historically, communication with families has consisted of information primarily coming from school to home (a newsletter, a notice about an event). However, effective teachers design their communication with families in ways that invite families to respond back with their ideas, suggestions, questions, and concerns.

Part of developing this relationship involves designing and sustaining two-way communication between school and home. Relationships are established when families believe that school personnel are qualified, fair, dependable and have their child’s best interests at heart. In most cases, trusting relationships are built over time and are based on frequent and honest two-way communication.

How to establish and support effective communication practices.

A **parent-teacher communication** plan should be developed and designed to set clear, consistent and high expectations for student performance in class. This will put parents on your side and enable them to reinforce your expectations in the home. Occasionally send home a quick positive “just checking in” note to families. They will appreciate the personal thought.

- Here are some steps to an activity that will build communication and understanding between home and school.
 - First, separate staff from families.

- Using chart paper and markers, invite both groups to write things they would like the other group to know about their student/child but do not often get the opportunity to share. Explain to both groups that this is an opportunity both groups desire.
- When complete, collect the charts, mix them up, and post them in the room. Invite everyone to reconvene after reviewing the charts for content.
- Use the comments as springboards for discussions and plans to improve communication with families. This activity demonstrates how two way communication helps everyone realize they want the same thing, success for their child.
- Open a booth at a HS ballgame for comments from families.
- Have a comment box in the main hallway, or a bulletin for families that is specific for Family Communication.
- Use surveys, focus groups, or other means to collect ongoing information from parents and families as to what information they need.
- Provide staff development on how to make the family communication time productive and how to graciously limit the amount of time visiting about their child when you need to visit with all of your parents. One remedy is for the teacher to simply say “ I am calling all of my parents tonight to let them know the great things that are happening. It sounds like you and I need more time to talk. Could we continue this conversation on/at _____? I really appreciate your understanding.
- As you create your communication letter, keep in mind to keep it simple, straightforward, and in a welcoming language for families. Try to keep away from using acronyms or educational terms that are probably unfamiliar to families.
- Communication needs to be an ongoing process. Just because you handed information out at the beginning of the school doesn't mean that it doesn't need to be reviewed or handed out again.
- Market and invite community members to participate in all school activities.
- Every document published should include school contact information. These documents should be available throughout the school year.
 - Consider putting them on the family bulletin board.
 - Consider putting these important documents in churches, grocery stores, medical clinics, In one case, the grocery store clerk asked the family if they had a child in school and if they answered yes, she would put a phone number and e-mail card in their grocery sack.

Choose Communication Tools that Work for Parents

Ask parents what communication methods are best for them. Do not assume that parents are all the same. Using multiple communication methods allows parents to hear from you in ways that work for them.

- Communicate often, all families want to be involved in their child's education.
- Some traditional options, like notes and calls home, can be time intensive, but work for some parents. There are also a ton of techie ways that can be a little easier to switch up.

While email may be great for some parents, you can also try texting, twitter or a classroom blog to provide a range of options. There are some online tools, such as SnappSchool.com, that will let you do multiple methods at once.

- Take a survey, ask what form of communication would work best for each individual family.
- Have a family/school journal going (which might include letters from student, family and school).
- Identify the different languages spoken by students and their families within the school
- Publicize your school website, in newsletters, and within the school.
- Place an easel outside the classroom, invest in a marque on main street, have automatic emails sent to different businesses in your community,
- Invest in an electronic marque for the exterior of the school building or some kind of signage that is visible.
- Within the school building place a sign that says, “How can we help you? Families and guests are welcome please come to the front office for assistance.”
- Publicize a phone number where families can call to leave a message with questions and concerns



Be sure to include your community! Put school information in area businesses (school calendar, registration information, immunization information). Establish relationships with local businesses that employ a large number of families from your school. Having a solid relationship with the business community will help to establish family friendly work policies that support education.

Technology is being used more and more as a method of communication to enhance school/home communication and allow teachers, parents, and students to stay connected and informed. Of course, there will always be occasions when teachers and parents need to engage in a face-to-face dialogue; an online chat does not offer the same level of personal connection as a face-to-face exchange. Here are some technology applications currently in use across SD.

- **Remind** sends immediate, up-to-date information to anyone (that is, anyone with a text-message-capable mobile phone). Teachers can send messages and updates to an entire class (or a group of classes), and the app offers more opportunities for students, parents, and teachers to interact, whether in groups or privately.
- **ClassDojo** Messenger lets teachers communicate instantly with students and their parents. Teachers set up classes, add their students' names, and then add the email addresses for students' parents. Parents receive an email invite to create a free account on the ClassDojo website that will allow them to connect with the teacher. After this one-time setup process, teachers, students, and parents can easily log into their accounts to send and receive messages. Teachers can choose to send class-wide

message blasts with text or images to parents and/or students, or they can send messages to individual students or parents.

- **Seesaw** is a digital portfolio that allows students to save and submit a variety of work -- videos, photos, text, and drawings. They can reflect on their work in writing or with a voice recording when they submit it, and teachers can offer feedback as well. Teachers can then approve items to make them accessible to parents. When teachers set up their classes, they can print a handout to give to parents explaining how to register and download the parent app (which is available online, on Android, Chromebook, and iOS) in a variety of languages.
- **Weebly** platform that lets teachers and students build websites for free. Many teachers use this as their classroom webpage to post general class information. Adults and kids can create personal websites devoted to any subject.
- **Twitter** is another platform with which many parents have experience—or about which they are eager to learn. Twitter is a communication tool in which information is communicated in short posts of up to 140 characters (called Tweets). It is also possible to post links, photos, and videos. Just as with Facebook, it is possible to set up your Twitter account so that only approved followers can view your Tweets. Tweets are most often sent using a smartphone, but can also be sent via computer.

Twitter can be used to:

- post reminders about events
 - share news of the day
 - share photographs and information from school-wide activities and class trips
- **Virtual Pinboards.** Platforms like Pinterest support a virtual pinboard that allows users to pin images from blogs and websites, making them easier to refer to later. Virtual pinboards are visually appealing and easy to use. You can use this tool to create boards that you think would interest your parents, such as Books and Activities, Places to Go, or Math and Science Activities. For example, if it is Science Fair time, you might have a board dedicated to science activities and experiments. Make parents aware of your site and how to set up an account so they can access it.
Pinterest is a lot of fun to use and is very easy for both you and your students' parents. Starting parents off with something that is practical, enjoyable, and easy to use is a great way to initiate them into using technology.
 - **Facebook** can be used by a school or a classroom. Many parents are already on Facebook, so it makes sense to communicate with them on a platform with which they are already familiar. Facebook allows you to share class news and information with the parents of your students. You can create a private parents' group for your class and share information only with the parents of your students. Types of information you might share: details of upcoming field trips, school closings (scheduled or unforeseen), special events or parties, pictures of student projects, students' published writing, etc.

The selection of the technological tools for parent teacher communication must be based on the answers to the following questions:

- What is the nature of the message to be communicated? Is it a private communication about a specific student, or news/message dissemination to the parent community as a whole?
- What are the types of technology that both teachers and parents have access to?
- What are their skills and willingness of parents and teachers to use the technology, and to what extent?
- Should technology replace face-to-face communication or will it complement offline communication?



Schools often have parents and families who are not comfortable with technology. Consider having high school students install apps for parents and families and show them how to use the technology.

“Effective communication depends much more on your tone of voice and body language than the words you say.” Blair Singer

Ideas for communicating with “hard-to-reach” parents and families.

- Many schools hire home-school liaisons. These positions are great for establishing communication with families. They can often help families to develop and implement strategies that can be used to help to improve attendance and/or address academic concerns.
- Parent mentoring is pairing volunteer parents to work with families new to the school or families who are hard to reach. The program is to provide families with individualized peer support and information to that help to foster learning and independence.
- Ask the kids! If phone numbers are constantly changing – most often their child will know the new number or how to access it.
- Ask the parents for phone updates at every opportunity! Anytime a parent or family member is in school – be sure to check to ensure you have the updated phone number or address.
- Schools have resources through a program called McKinney Vento. The McKinney-Vento program addresses the problems that homeless children and youth have faced in enrolling, attending, and succeeding in school. Under this program, State educational agencies (SEAs) must ensure that each homeless child and youth has equal access to the same free, appropriate public education—including a public preschool education—as other children and youth. LEAs must ensure homeless students have access to the services they are entitled to so they are empowered to achieve the same state academic standards required of all students

- Place school newsletters or school information in community places (businesses, health clinics, grocery store, laundromat, community center, restaurants, or just any place in the community where parents and families can have access.
- Consider conducting a home visit. Home visits are a way to establish positive contact and communication with families. Educators arrange to meet in the home environment or alternative community location where the family feels comfortable.

Ideas for reaching out to parents and families of English Language Learners.

Everyone benefits when parents and families are involved in their child's learning. Using their preferred language is the essential place to start. Without a common language, very little communication can take place. Here are some ideas that can be used to build a relationship by reaching out through their native language.

- Find a fully bilingual interpreter. This could be a school employee, parent liaison, family member, friend, or community member. It is always best to find an adult and not rely on the student to serve as the translator.
- Translate written communication that you send home. Find a way to send home information in their language.
- Learn some of the language yourself. Even if it is common words or a greeting, this gesture will help to make parents and family members feel welcome.
- Provide parents and families with a list of names and phone numbers of bilingual staff who they can contact regarding educational questions or concerns. Encourage families to reach out to other families so they can share experiences and help one another.

Handling the tough conversations with care.

It is an unavoidable fact, but there will always be challenges. There will be many days when your communication skills are put to the test. Good communication skills are important; but for school principals and educators – these skills are essential. Look for tips in the toolkit on how to handle even the most challenging parent!

Open House/Back to School Event

Building solid relationships with your students and their families is arguably the most important thing you can do to be an effective teacher. Getting to know students sounds like a simple thing to do, something that just comes naturally and doesn't require any planning. Unfortunately, we do not always end up putting as much effort into this as we think. As we teach classroom procedures, get bus and lunch forms filled out, and begin diving into our content, relationship-building with parents and families can fall by the wayside. Remember at the beginning of the school year – one of your most important jobs is getting to know each and every student and their family.

Starting the school year right might include a back to school night or open house. Done right – this is a great opportunity to start to get to know your students and their parents.

Here are some ideas for planning a back to school night with a focus on building relationships!

- For pre-school and kindergarten families consider offering a 3 week back to school class, one night a week, where parents can come in, review the curriculum with the teacher, get to know parents of their child’s classmates, tour the building, ask questions concerning safety, lunch, teachers, behavior, take this time to build a relationship with these families so that they begin to trust you before the school year even begins.
- Have the event the same weekend on the same date every year.
- Have the community members involved with the back to school celebration, a great way to recruit volunteers.
- Give school bus rides, parents can ride with their child, familiarize them with the bus they are to ride, the way to the bus drop off at school and where the child is to be dropped off at the end of their school day.
- New families may appreciate a home visits prior to the start of school as a welcome and as an orientation to the school.
- Plan a scavenger hunt as a way to explore the school and school grounds.

REMEMBER – it is not just the student who enrolls in the school – it is their whole family! Consider assigning “buddies” to new students and mentors to parent and family members. Create a poster about yourself and place outside your classroom – show where you were born, went to school, your pets, interests and hobbies, favorite books, where you graduated college. Students and their families like learning about teachers as real people!

Parent/Teacher conferences

Scheduled parent-teacher conferences for all families are an essential component of home-school communication. Parents and families can provide you with important perspectives and information about their child. You need the help of parents to do the best possible job of educating every child in your classroom. Parent-teacher conferences offer an opportunity to listen and share and reinforce the idea that you are working together as a TEAM.

Consider student-led conferences. Students often do better in school when they feel in charge and accountable for the quality of their work. Students develop a portfolio of work and they share and discuss this work during their conference.

Teacher-parent conferences give you an opportunity to increase communication between school and home, keep parents informed about their child's progress, and develop a plan for the student's future.

Communicating about Attendance

Parents and families are essential partners in promoting good attendance because they, ultimately, have the responsibility for making sure their children get to school every day. When children are young, they are especially dependent upon adults or older siblings to help them get to school or preschool. Just as parents should focus on how their children are performing academically, they have a responsibility to set expectations for good attendance and to monitor their children's absences, so that missed days don't add up to academic trouble.

Parents need to be given the right information about attendance. Good attendance is not just complying with rules; it is how children are provided more and better opportunities to learn. Parents and families typically don't realize how many days their child has missed across a year. Two or three absence a month can add up to too much lost time in the classroom. While some absences, especially those due to illness, are unavoidable it is important to get children to school as often as possible. Another myth about attendance is that it matters mostly for older students in middle or high school. We don't recognize the adverse impact that poor attendance can have on learning as early as preschool or the importance of building a habit of good attendance from the beginning. Too few families or community members are aware of these realities. Beyond their role in delivering children to school, families play an essential role in identifying what the barriers are to attendance, as well as what would motivate students to go to school.

Transition

By definition, transition means the change from one place, state of being, or condition to another place, state of being, or condition. This can be an especially nervous time for parents and families and their children, especially if they are making a major transition into elementary school, middle school, high school, work or post-secondary. Transition comes with many questions and curiosities about academics, social skills, managing a social life, handling coursework, worries about changing classes, and the comfort of having only one teacher homeroom, to using a combination lock.

Transition into Kindergarten

It is critically important for children to start right when they transition into kindergarten. There will be many other school transitions – but this is the first significant one. Parents and family members want the best for their children and want them to be happy, successful, and fulfilled during their school life.

Transition into Middle School

Middle school transition is the process of changing from an elementary to a middle school environment. As young adolescents are changing school buildings they are also changing hormonally, mentally, and physically. This transition affects young adolescents' academic experiences, motivation, self-perception, and self-regulatory beliefs. Students moving into middle school face a whole new set of challenges, such as a larger school, changing classes and teachers; learning how to open a locker; and of course the added pressure of fitting in. Although young adolescents seem to cry out for independence, they also need protection, security, and structure.

Transition into High School

The transition between middle school and high school is difficult for a variety of reasons and may lead to students dropping out. Recent research shows that a smooth transition to ninth grade contributes to students' success in high school and beyond. The phrase "falling off track" is often used in reference to high school transition planning. This can simplistically be defined as a student not earning the adequate course credits necessary for a four-year graduation date. There are several reasons why students fall off track during their first year in high school: 1) The social and developmental adjustment; 2) Structural and organizational change; 3) Increased academic rigor and failure.

Families often wonder what they can do to help their high school student succeed. Families need to be encouraged to communicate academic expectations as well as nurture and support education and career goals.

Transition to college/career

Graduation day! For parents and families this is a proud day and as their "child" walks across the stage in their cap and gown – the feeling of satisfaction mixed with excitement and sadness is evident. Today's graduates are living in an exciting time, with an increasingly diverse and mobile society, new technologies and expanding opportunities. To help ensure they are prepared to become the next generation of parents, workers, leaders and citizens, students need support, guidance and opportunities during adolescence, a time of rapid growth and change.

Making Connections:

Leadership is Key to Creating Strong Relationships Among Families, Parents, and Community

When school principals believe in their leadership capacity and view families as partners in their school and community they are on the path to engaging parents and families. In order for family and community engagement to be successful the administration will need to build relationships between family members, community members, school staff and students.

Relationships cannot exist without trust. At the heart of most disengagement is a lack of trust between families and school personnel. Trust allows for actions that are otherwise not possible.

School administrators must be effective in communication and promote this with their staff. Effective communication occurs across a multitude of avenues, and creates and promotes opportunities for parents and families to share their experiences, beliefs, and viewpoints, i.e. focus groups, open forums, surveys, newsletters, email etc.

As a result of ongoing two way communication between home and school there is a positive change in the school setting.

South Dakota Framework for Effective Principals
Domain 5: School and Community Relationships
Principals and assistant principals shall demonstrate the ability to foster relationships by collaborating with parents, staff, and community members.

Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching
Domain 3: Instruction



Link to Section 4 of the SD TOOLKIT for Parent and Family Engagement.

If you would like to contribute an idea or suggestion related parent and family engagement please send an email to Dawn Smith DawnL.Smith@state.sd.us at the SD Department of Education.

Section 5

Learning Practices - Bringing it all Home

“Children are made readers on the laps of their parents.” By Emile Buchwald

Helping Families to Support Learning at Home

Why is it important

Families are their child’s first and most important teacher. Parents and families play a critical role in student success. They support their child’s learning, help guide them through the school system, advocate for more and improved learning opportunities, and collaborate to achieve more effective educational opportunities for their child. Administrators and educators must provide support and resources in order to assist all parents and families to help support their child’s learning.

What is it?

In districts and schools across the country, most administrators and educators agree that families must be involved in their children’s education and that partnerships between home and school are critically important. However, the question remains – how do we get families involved? It is essential that administrators and educators believe that families make a difference to academic success and growth! There are three key elements that influence how and why families become engaged in their children’s education:

- **How parents develop their “job description” as an educational partner.** This essentially means what do parents and families think they are supposed to do to help their children and what do their family and friends say about what’s important. Cultural backgrounds might strongly impact this decision.
- **The confidence level parents and families have about their ability to help their child.** Parents and families are more likely to be involved if they think they have the skills and knowledge they need to help their child; they know where to find sources of support when needed; and recognize that they can make a positive impact on their child’s learning.
- **A sense of invitation.** This invitation is influenced by signals that parents and families receive from their children and the school staff. These signals let parents and families know what is expected. Being welcomed or invited is often the most important of the factors related to parent and family engagement.

Opportunities to help families support learning at home.

The following ideas and suggestions are ways that administrators and educators can help families support their child’s academic and developmental growth.

The Love of Reading Starts at Home

From day one a child’s brain begins forming connections very quickly-connections which build the foundation for all learning he or she will do later in life. In fact 90 % of children’s critical

brain development occurs by age 5. Children who are read to, sung to, and talked to from a young age develop bigger vocabularies, become better readers, and are more likely to succeed in school. Vocabulary development at age 3 has been found to predict reading achievement by grade 3.

Educators must assist families in developing a language rich environment. A language rich environment includes access to books and is essential to developing basic reading skills, leads to longer and more frequent shared reading between parents and children, and produces increased enjoyment of books and improved attitude towards reading and academics.

Staff should assist families in modeling reading and in how families can talk to their child about reading. Teachers must encourage the love of reading for students and families. Educators should communicate with students and their families to learn the interests of students, and determine appropriate books to engage students.



Linking to Learning

Historically, parent and family engagement has been school based and event driven in which success is determined based on the number of families that show up. Schools provide a-family reading or math event, newsletter, and/or college readiness night. **However**, think of the number of events schools host that bring families into the school to support their child (i.e. book fairs; choir/band/or grade level concerts; make and take parties; athletic events; bingo; carnivals.....). These events are often overlooked **opportunities!** What would it look like if administrators and/or educators would use these times to connect families with information about student learning! All programs should help families to understand what their child is learning and doing in the classroom, promote high standards for learning, and provide skills to families on things they can do at home. What does this look like? Here are some ideas:

- Set up one of the powerpoints found in the toolkit to show in the background of a large event, like waiting for a Christmas concert to start. Families can see/read/learn from the PP while waiting.
- Have a “commercial” break in which the administrator, educator, or a student share information about future dates or specific student learning goals during athletic events, plays, concerts, donuts for dads/muffins for moms.
- Use the pickup/drop off times more effectively by having teachers available to greet parents. This provides a quick opportunity to share information with parents and families. (This is also a great way to build relationships with parents and family members!) Honoring teachers’ time is important also perhaps there could be certain days of the week that teachers are available.

Building Relationships

Meaningful parent and family engagement cannot be established unless there are relationships built on trust and respect between home and school. Building relationships is critically important, especially if there is a history of mistrust between families and the school staff, or when there have been negative past experiences. If this is the situation – school mailings,

newsletters, auto calls, and even incentives do little to get families engaged. Relationships are the foundation for shared responsibility in learning act as an incentive and motivating agent for continued participation of families and staff. Staff AND families will be more willing to learn from each other when they have a shared sense of respect and trust.

Relationships cannot exist without trust. At the heart of most disengagement is a lack of trust between families and school personnel. Rebuilding and supporting trusting relationships is essential for engaging families in the academic lives of their children. Trust plays a dominate role in eradicating fears that exist in relationships. Fear is one of the most energy- robbing emotions any of us can experience. Fear can lead to many irrational behaviors and actions. Steve M Constantino

Homework

The usefulness and need for homework has increasingly been a topic of debate. Homework can serve many useful purposes – practice, preparation for new learning, communication from home to school as to learning skills/topics, personal development – a student needs to learn to manage time and balance multiple activities, and even public relations! Many parents and families who grew up with homework might view the school as being “less challenging” if their children do not have homework.

Schools should really consider the development of a school policy related to homework. This school-wide approach creates for consistency across the teaching staff. Clear communication to families related to homework requirements must occur – especially at the beginning of the year. Homework that is time-wasting, rote, or repetitive tasks appears to parents and families as lacking clear learning or teaching purposes. Another advantage of a school-wide policy is that students are not inadvertently overloaded with demands from teachers who are unaware of what others teachers are asking of the same student. A concern especially in high schools. All children and young adults should be encouraged to read, write, use math meaningful in real life, understand the larger world around them, and develop their emotional intelligence. This encouragement should be a part of everyday family interaction outside of school.

Curriculum of the home

The curriculum of the home refers to specific family behaviors that will enhance children’s learning. These are day in, day out routines that if used consistently will help children do better in school. Parents and families should be informed and supported to implement these routines in their home!

The curriculum of the home:

- Establish a daily family routine
- Monitor out of school activities
- Model the value of education, learning, and hard work

- Express high but realistic expectations of behavior and achievement
- Encourage children’s development and progress in school
- Encourage reading, writing, and discussions among family members.

Talking to Parents and Families about Content Standards

Parents want their children to get good grades, be employable, and be prepared for college or career in a global world. One way educators can engage parents in the educational process is by communicating to them the standards their children will be expected to know and be able to do. South Dakota’s content standards clearly state the expectations for each grade level. The challenge is – how to share this information with families in order to help them know how to successfully partner with the school and how to connect this learning to real world applications found at home. Families should be connected to the standards their children are learning through ongoing conversations with their child’s teachers. Everyone benefits when parents have knowledge of and access to the South Dakota Content Standards.

Sharing academic and developmental goals

An essential part of education is establishing goals. At the heart of education is ensuring that all students are prepared for life! Many schools establish grade level and school level goals in areas they need to improve based off of evaluations that are available as well as other observations and data sources.

Sharing this information with parents and families will ensure that everyone is working together on the same team. Communicating expectations to students and families and providing feedback to students and families is critical for the engagement of families in the academic process. When families understand the learning expectations for their students they are able to reinforce at home what is taught at school and assist in making connections to the broader world.

Sustaining your efforts!

Districts and schools who create and maintain parent and family school partnerships must sustain these efforts over time. Family-school partnerships must be systemic or purposefully designed as essential elements of educational goals such as school readiness, student achievement, and school improvement. Family-school partnerships must be integrated into ongoing processes such as training and professional development, teaching and learning, and curriculum and community collaboration. Family-school partnerships must be operated with adequate resources and support such as funding, space, equipment, and staff time and positions. School leadership must be committed to and have a systemic vision of parent and family engagement.

Helping Families to Understand Data

Why is this important?

Families are interested in knowing how well their children are performing in school.

In general, parents and families are primarily interested in knowing how well their own child is doing, but also how their school as a whole is performing. Schools often have so much data about students that they struggle to determine which data is the most important to share. Student achievement data is important, but so is information about developmental progress, peer interactions, behavior, study habits, and attendance. Sharing data about the school and the school district provides a bigger picture of whether all students have the opportunity for success and if school achievement efforts are being successful in reducing achievement gaps between groups of students.

Parents from a variety of ethnic backgrounds with children at all school levels were asked to identify their reasons for wanting data about their child. The following priorities were identified by 90% of parents responding (1009 parents participated):

- Monitoring their child's general progress in education.
- Knowing when to be concerned about their child's progress
- Monitoring their child's achievement of educational standards.
- Communicating with their child's teacher and school administrator
- Helping their child with homework.

What is it?

"Data" refers to the combined set of information about students' achievements, strengths, and challenges, area of interest, and learning styles. Traditional ways that educators have shared student data with families – through report cards/progress reports and parent-teacher conference – provide some information on their child's progress, but these opportunities don't occur frequently enough to promote ongoing school/family communication and information sharing.

How to share data effectively.

Communication is important in helping parents and families make sense of data so they can provide appropriate supports at home. Communication needs to be ongoing and two way and provide opportunities for families to ask questions, provide information about their child, and offer feedback about the data they receive. Presenting data in meaningful ways includes using language that is understood (watch the jargon!). This means involving families in setting goals and developing an action plan for improving their child's school and will ultimately improve their child's performance.

Making Connections:

Leadership is Key to Creating Strong Relationships Among Families, Parents, and Community

When school principals believe in their leadership capacity and view families as partners in their school and community they are on the path to engaging parents and families. In order for family and community engagement to be successful the administration will need to build relationships between family members, community members, school staff and students.

Relationships cannot exist without trust. At the heart of most disengagement is a lack of trust between families and school personnel. Trust allows for actions that are otherwise not possible.

When parents and families are educated and informed on the curriculum being taught in their child’s classroom this knowledge empowers them to work alongside schools to ensure positive learning is taking place. When parents and families are confident about their own abilities to support and participate in their child’s learning journey. Parents and families must find personal meaning and relevance in their children’s educational experiences

South Dakota Framework for Principals
Domain 2: Instructional Leadership
Principals and assistant principals shall demonstrate the ability to communicate with staff and review research and data to promote a school culture and instructional program that foster student learning and professional growth for staff.
Domain 3: School Operations and Resources
Principals and assistant principals shall demonstrate the ability to efficiently and productively manage school operations and resources.

Charlotte Danielson’s Framework for Teaching
Domain 4: Professional Responsibilities



Link to Section 5 of the SD TOOLKIT for Parent and Family Engagement.

If you would like to contribute an idea or suggestion related parent and family engagement please send an email to Dawn Smith DawnL.Smith@state.sd.us at the SD Department of Education.

References

Bernabei, P., Kaniess, S., Elaine, R., Cody, T., Cole, M. [Mary], Cole, M. [Michael], & Sweeney, W. (2009). *Top 20 parents: Raising happy, responsible & emotionally healthy children*. St. Paul, MN: Top 20 Training.

Epstein, J. L. (2011). *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools* (2nd ed.). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Henderson, A. T., Mapp, K. L., Johnson, V. R., & Davies, D. (2007). *Beyond the bake sale: The essential guide to family-school partnerships*. New York, NY: The New Press.

<https://www2.ed.gov/documents/family-community/frameworks-resources.pdf>

This guide was developed for educators in Title I schools to enhance their capacity to build relationships with parents and families. It is the belief that when educators build a strong capacity to work with parents and families and reach out to build partnerships families and schools both will benefit.

The development of these materials was supported by federal dollars from the U.S. Department of Education, through the South Dakota Department of Education, Title Programs. However, the contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

Authorization to reproduce in whole or in part is granted. Permission to reprint this publication is not necessary.

