

Connecticut State Board of Education
Hartford

**Position Statement on
School-Family-Community Partnerships for Student Success**

Adopted November 4, 2009

The Connecticut State Board of Education believes education is a shared responsibility throughout a student's life from birth to adulthood. Families, school staff and community members make important contributions to student success and the best results come when all three work together as equal partners. The purpose of these three-way partnerships is to support students' success in school and through life.

A Definition of School-Family-Community Partnerships

The State Board of Education endorses a research-based definition of school-family-community partnerships that can be applied to policies and practices across the state that result in student success.

School-family-community partnerships are:

- ***A shared responsibility*** with schools and other community organizations committed to engaging families in meaningful, culturally respectful ways as well as families actively supporting their children's learning and development;
- ***Continuous across a student's life***, beginning in infancy and extending through college and career preparation programs; and
- ***Carried out everywhere that children learn*** including homes, early childhood education programs, schools, after-school programs, faith-based institutions, playgrounds, and community settings.

Taken together, this definition supports the creation of pathways to partnerships that honor the dynamic, multiple and complementary ways that children learn and grow. Family engagement is everything family members do to support their children's learning, guide them through a complex school system, advocate for them when problems arise, and collaborate with educators and community groups to achieve more equitable and effective learning opportunities. The terms parent or family are intended to mean a natural, adoptive or foster parent, or other adult serving as a parent, such as a close relative, legal or educational guardian and/or a community or agency advocate.

As students become older and more mature, they should and will take increasing responsibility for their learning. Nevertheless, they will need support from the adults in their lives throughout their educational careers.

A Comprehensive Approach

In order to encourage a comprehensive approach to school-family-community partnerships, the Board recommends that school districts develop programs addressing each of the following six standards:

1. ***Parent Education*** – Identify and prioritize as needed, secondary school completion options and English language learning services for parents of school age children. Support the family's essential role in encouraging children's learning at every age and in developing positive parent-child relationships.
2. ***Communicating and creating a welcoming climate*** – Promote ongoing, clear, meaningful, and two-way communication about school programs and student learning, and develop personal relationships among school staff, families, students and community members.
3. ***Volunteering*** – Involve families in instruction and support, both in and out of school, and in creating a family-friendly atmosphere at school.
4. ***Supporting learning at home*** – Involve families in learning and enrichment activities at home and in the community that are linked to academic standards.

5. **Decision-making and advocacy** – Provide opportunities for families to develop and strengthen their leadership roles in school decisions, especially those related to student performance and school improvement.
6. **Collaborating with community** – Provide coordinated access to community resources, serve as a resource to the community and offer opportunities for community service.

To be effective, these standards of engagement should be connected to the goals of the school district's improvement planning, and designed to engage students and families in strengthening specific knowledge and skills identified as needing work by assessment data. Parent and community engagement that is linked to student learning has a greater effect on achievement than more general involvement.

Characteristics of Successful School-Family-Community Partnerships

The State Board of Education recognizes that school-family-community partnerships must focus on activities that are linked to children's learning. They also must reflect the many ways in which families, community organizations and school staff engage with and support one another, from promoting family literacy, to improving schools and advocating for greater educational quality and opportunity.

Successful partnerships are as varied as their local communities, yet they share certain common characteristics. Effective partnerships are:

1. **Respectful** – All partners develop relationships that recognize, respect and build on the diverse strengths, talents, needs, and interests of families and students.
2. **Inclusive** – Staff reach out to all families, especially those who are culturally diverse or have low levels of income. They examine their assumptions and come to know and learn from families as individuals. All families are honored and valued as partners in their children's education.
3. **Flexible** – Partnerships are tailored to all stages of a student's educational career, and offer a variety of times, locations and opportunities for participation.
4. **Democratic** – Families and young people are equal partners with staff, together constructing programs, policies and information. Leadership is open to families, students and other partners.
5. **Systematic** – Partnerships focus on student achievement and help families and community members understand what students are learning and what the district's standards for successful performance mean for different ages and grade levels.

Benefits of High-Quality School-Family-Community Partnership Programs

Research shows that well-planned partnerships among families, school and community members can make a powerful contribution to greater student success. No matter what their income or background, students with involved families tend to have higher grades and test scores, better attendance, and higher rates of homework completion. They enroll in more challenging classes, have better social skills and behavior, and are more likely to graduate and go on to college.

Families and schools also benefit. Families engaged in partnerships have a greater sense of efficacy, stronger social ties and are more likely to continue their own education. Teachers report greater job satisfaction when they work with families, and families who are more involved hold more positive views of teachers and schools. Increased involvement develops feelings of ownership, resulting in greater family and community support for public education.

The State Board of Education understands that it takes more than engaged families and communities to sustain high student achievement. High-performing schools have many characteristics, including high standards and expectations for student learning, effective school leadership as well as high quality curriculum and instruction. Research also shows, however, that successful schools also have strong ties with families and their community. An effective program of school-family-community partnerships is a critical support students require to realize their potential, and one essential step toward eliminating our state's achievement gaps.

References

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Policy Guidance for Position Statement on School-Family-Community Partnerships for Student Success

November 2009

The Connecticut State Board of Education in its 2009 *Position Statement on School-Family-Community Partnerships for Student Success* calls for a shared responsibility among three equal partners to support students' success in school and through life. This document is intended to offer additional guidance to the Position Statement.

To develop effective school-family-community partnership programs, state, district and school leaders, along with parents, community leaders and students, must identify goals for their collaboration. Each member of the team has an important role to play and unique contributions to make to the partnership.

State Department of Education Responsibilities

Develop and promote school-family-community partnership programs that contribute to success for all students.

- Provide resources and technical assistance to school districts to help them implement programs of partnership, in accordance with this policy statement. This leadership includes promoting the six standards of family engagement and the full involvement of all major partners.
- Expand the message from a focus on parenting to emphasize the shared responsibility of families, schools and communities to create pathways for family engagement to support student achievement.
- Hold public forums, summits and other meetings to solicit ideas from parents, educators and others about how families, schools and communities can work together to support student learning.

Coordinate and strengthen the family and community engagement components of all major state and federal programs.

- Identify all state and federal programs that have family and community engagement requirements and assess their implementation and effectiveness.
- Collect and disseminate information about current research, best practice and model policies and programs.

School Districts' Responsibilities

Create a culture of partnership.

- The district must make family engagement a priority, set clear goals for school-family-community partnerships that all schools are expected to meet and monitor progress on those goals.
- The school board should establish policies that support partnerships, such as making school facilities available to the community and families and creating roles for businesses and community organizations.

Connect school-family-community partnerships directly to the district's improvement initiative.

- The district should designate a senior level administrator responsible for school-family-community partnerships to provide leadership for program implementation, coordination and accountability.
- The district should guide all schools to develop and implement a systematic and effective plan for engaging families in improving student achievement that aligns with school and district improvement plans.

Organize district resources to create a structure of support so that all schools can and will establish and sustain strong partnerships.

- The district should develop structures to implement fully the six standards of family engagement and monitor progress to determine which practices produce the best results.
- The district should provide training and support for teachers, administrators, other staff members and families in developing partnership skills, especially understanding and appreciating diversity, developing skills to work with people from different backgrounds and linking programs and activities to student learning.
- The district should provide learning and development opportunities for families such as parent leadership and advocacy training, adult education, literacy and English language instruction so that parents may be full partners in their children's education.
- The district should prioritize engagement of parents of school age children who may need English as a Second Language program and high school completion programs such as GED test preparation.

Schools' Responsibilities

Welcome all family and community members to the school.

- The principal should consistently demonstrate commitment to families and expect and support all staff to create a respectful, inclusive and family-friendly environment.
- School staff should make every effort to build trusting, relevant relationships among families, staff and community members.

Engage families and community members in a systematic way to help the school meet its student achievement goals.

- All family engagement programs and activities should be linked to student learning so that families can understand what their children are learning in class and gain skills to help them at home.
- Teachers should learn and practice effective, research-based strategies linking family engagement to student success.

Communicate regularly with families about student learning.

- The school should use many two-way pathways for communication, in everyday language that is translated into families' home languages.
- Schools should make it easy for any family to communicate with teachers, the principal and other administrators.

Encourage families to be advocates for their own and others' children, to ensure that students are treated fairly and have access to meaningful learning opportunities.

- Give families information about how the school system works and how to raise questions or concerns.
- Give families information and support to monitor their children's progress and guide them toward their goals, including college.
- Promote opportunities for families to take part in learning and development programs related to leadership, advocacy and adult education including literacy and English language instruction.

Make families and school staff equal partners in decisions that affect children and families.

- A school council or other decision-making group should include families and give them a voice in major decisions, including principal selection.
- Every school should have a strong, broad-based parent organization that can advocate on behalf of families and children.

Collaborate with community organizations to connect students, families and staff to expand learning opportunities, community services and civic participation.

- School staff should work closely with community organizations, businesses and institutes of higher education to make resources available and turn the school into a hub of community life.

Families' Responsibilities

Create a home environment that promotes learning and holds children to high expectations.

- Engage in family reading activities and support homework. Emphasize the value of education and hard work. Talk to children about school and help them think about and plan for their future.

Build a relationship with children's teachers.

- Let teachers know families want to work with them as a partner to ensure children's success. Ask teachers to keep families informed about children's progress.

Take advantage of the opportunities the school and district provide.

- Join the parent organization and seek out ways to contribute at home or at school. Attend meetings and get to know school staff.
- Engage in parent leadership and family literacy programs that build parents' own skills and knowledge.

Make sure children go to school every day and closely monitor how they are doing in school.

- If a child is struggling or falling behind, contact the teacher or a counselor and insist on getting help.
- Make sure children are taking challenging classes or programs. Ask teachers or counselors for help if children need it to succeed. Learn about what students must do to graduate on time and be ready for college.

Community Leaders' Responsibilities

Work with the district to create community schools that provide integrated family support services.

- Survey families and staff at each school to find out their interests and needs. Respond by mapping the assets in the community, building upon existing resources and co-locating social and health services in schools.

Form a network of organizations that can partner with schools to strengthen families and support student success.

- Community members and employees can: serve as volunteers, role models and mentors; give students individual attention; and demonstrate the value the community places on education. Businesses can sponsor partnership activities and encourage employees to play an active role. Libraries, museums, colleges and cultural agencies can reduce fees and make special programs available for families.

Students' Responsibilities (as developmentally appropriate)

Take responsibility for learning.

- Students are entitled to a free public education and should take full advantage, asking for help when needed.
- Take initiative to find and explore new areas of learning that are of personal interest.

Form a student organization at school.

- Let the teachers and principal know what is working well in the school and how it could be better.

Join the school improvement team.

- Ask the principal and teachers for student-led conferences where students can display work, explain what has been learned and discuss what students want and will need to learn.

Plan for your future and think carefully about goals in life.

- Discuss ideas with family, teachers, counselors and other adults. Find out how to reach those goals.