

The School-Family Partnership District Plan

2005-2006



**SEATTLE
PUBLIC
SCHOOLS**

**Presented to Superintendent Raj Manhas
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Acknowledgements

Seattle Public Schools thanks the School-Family Partnership Parent Advisory Committee for the many hours of work dedicated to the creation of this plan:

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Seattle Public Schools

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Executive Summary

While it is universally acknowledged that parental and other family involvement in a child's education is the most important factor in making that education successful, the reality is a record of wide disparities among schools and families regarding the amount and quality of family involvement in children's education. Seattle's public schools have a historic opportunity to do something about that.

The School-Family Partnership policy introduced by the Family Partnerships Project, lead by Adie Simmons, and approved in August 2004 by the Seattle School Board, paves the way for a district-wide optimization of family involvement. The policy makes it clear that, "the Board recognizes that parent and family involvement in education has a positive effect on student achievement and is an important strategy in reducing achievement gaps."

The School-Family Partnership Advisory Committee was created in 2005 by a multi-disciplinary, district-wide team lead by Thelma Payne, Manager of the Family Support Worker Program. Committee members were appointed by Superintendent Raj Manhas to propose a plan that could make this policy operational. Over several months, the committee endeavored to research and identify family involvement mechanisms that have been developed from the greatest collective brainpower and experience of experts in the field of education, and would address the unique needs of Seattle's schools. What the committee discovered is that a meaningful improvement in family involvement in Seattle's public schools can only be accomplished through the development of a greatly expanded supporting infrastructure and the adoption of proven effective methodologies.

The committee first drew upon the experience and knowledge of its own members to identify barriers to family involvement as well as promising practices. In addition, the committee benefited from the experience of Seattle's own Family Partnership Project, an initiative funded by the City of Seattle's Families and Education Levy and one that has won national awards for its best practices. The coordinator of the project, Adie Simmons, generously consulted with committee members on what could make the best possible district-wide plan for family involvement.

Perhaps the cornerstone of the plan being proposed is the framework that was selected. Research revealed that two national models that closely resembled and borrowed from each other have also been widely implemented over several years and thus benefit from continual fine-tuning from nationwide user groups. These models are the National PTA and the National Network of Partnership Schools, the latter supported by the well-respected work out of Johns Hopkins University and that of Joyce Epstein.

The committee blended the model frameworks to arrive at the following six categories of family involvement:

- A. Communication
- B. Parenting
- C. Student Learning
- D. Volunteering

- E. School Decision-making and Advocacy
- F. Collaborating with Community

In addition, the committee itemized specific responsibilities in each of these areas respectively for families, schools and the district.

The framework provides the blueprint for how schools, families and the district can work together to optimize family involvement. There are both guidelines and expectations embedded in the component responsibilities, which taken together provide the core standards around which training can be established and enhanced. In addition, the committee has proposed accountability measures to ensure the success of the plan, and has launched a list of promising practices used by schools for those who want to emulate or replicate.

It is hoped that the framework and its appendices will constitute a reference manual that will be widely used by central district administrators, school administrators, teachers, family support workers, and parents.

While having a central framework for family involvement is very important, there is little hope that there will be any improvement in family involvement in Seattle's public schools without the establishment of an infrastructure to support it. The cornerstone of that infrastructure is the installation of paid family involvement coordinators in every school. Indeed, the only examples in which there has been a good track record of family involvement were in those schools that had paid coordinators. Several years ago, the City Families and Education Levy provided \$2,000 to each school to hire a volunteer coordinator.

Where those monies have disappeared, there have been steep declines in family involvement. The plan calls for the re-institution of coordinators in every school, to coordinate, monitor, educate and promote family involvement.

To ensure that family involvement is taken as seriously by the district as we all know its importance merits, the committee is further recommending that there be a director position established for family involvement that would report directly to the superintendent. Clearly this director will also need to have support staff to help with the support of and liaison with all the school family involvement coordinators.

Besides the family involvement coordinator, the committee is recommending each school develop a School-Family Partnership Team, along the lines of the Action Team model established by the National Partnerships Network, Joyce Epstein model. This team will develop a family involvement plan customized to their respective schools.

To fully implement the plan, all family involvement personnel and parent leaders will need to be trained in the best ways to effectively engage families in their schools and their children's education. This training will most likely rely on the training curriculum used by the national models, with some enhancement for Seattle schools. It is hoped that this training will occur regularly and be made available to all families in the district.

One of the biggest barriers to effective family involvement has been one of insufficient, unclear, and ineffective communication. In addition to bolstering the communication capabilities through the

addition of the aforementioned staff and teams, the committee is recommending a central information and referral service be established for the district.

The service will be staffed by paid information and referral professionals who have been well trained in communication skills, problem-solving techniques, district protocols and regulations, community resources and education resources. These professionals will be available via a call center and online to help Seattle schools families and staff navigates their way through the complications of various school issues and put them in touch with the appropriate contacts within the schools.

In addition, they will help inquirers find district and community resources that will enable them to become more involved in the schools and in their children's education. A regularly maintained computerized database of resources will provide the information for the professionals to assist inquirers to resolve their problems. This service will provide "one-stop shopping", thereby reducing frustrations and facilitating linkages to spur effective family involvement.

