

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND EMPOWERMENT POLICY**School Parents Organizations District Plan****2008 - 2009****Overview****Introduction**

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- The adoption of the Cleveland Municipal School District Board's (CMSD) Strategic Plan in August of 2007 placed top priority on creating and maintaining a District-wide climate conducive to parent and family involvement.
 - As part of the Board's Policy, a Parent Advisory Committee was appointed in January 2008 by the Deputy Chief of Student, Parent and Community Engagement to recommend uniform family involvement practices across the Cleveland Municipal School District.
 - The Parent Advisory Committee will conclude its work in August 2008.
 - The Parent Advisory Committee proposes the implementation of the School Parent Organization (SPO) Plan outlined in this publication.
 - The CMSD Plan incorporates Joyce Epstein's framework promoted by the National Network of District Schools and endorses the model developed by James Comer.
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Defining Family Involvement

- Family involvement in education is defined as the active participation of parents, family members or other caring adults in the education of children through:
 - academic support,
 - advocacy, and
 - Districts in the school system.
 - The ultimate goal of family involvement is to effectively contribute to student success in school and life.
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District Infrastructure

Introduction In order to accomplish the objectives outlined in the School Parent Organization District Plan, the following initiatives should be implemented.

Executive Director F.A.C.E.

- The Executive Director of Family and Community Engagement (FACE) will oversee and implement the School Parent Organization’s District Plan and will report directly to the Deputy Chief of Student, Family and Community Engagement.

Family Liaisons

- Family Liaisons will be assigned to every school to assist families and oversee family involvement activities.

School Parent Organization Teams

- School Parent Organization District teams will be established in every school to facilitate home/school relationships and monitor school systemic change.
- The SPO teams will consist of the principal, school staff, parents and/or family members, and community members.
- School teams will receive training and support from the District.
- SPO Teams will develop and implement a family involvement plan designed specifically for their schools.

District Parent/Family Advisory Committee

- The Parent Advisory Committee will be a standing district committee that provides recommendations to the Chief Academic Officer.
- The District will support the committee's efforts by providing meals, transportation, childcare, clerical support and translation/interpreting services as needed.

Education and Training The District will develop an education and training program based on the components outlined in this plan.

Step	Action
1	A team of District employees and parents will develop a district-wide training program that addresses strategies for building culturally relevant parent/family involvement in every school.
2	A core of parents and community members will be trained within each cluster to train others in their community.
3	District will provide parent leadership training bi-annually in all District regions.

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District Infrastructure Continued

Family Liaisons Involvement Resource Service The district will establish an information and referral service for the Cleveland Municipal School District

Step	Action
1	A hot line in the Office of Youth Support Services with trained, information and referral professionals will be established to provide problem solving, referral to education and community resources, and advocacy for SPO families encountering barriers to involvement in their children's education.
2	An on-line database of education and community resources (used by information and referral professionals) will be established and regularly updated.
3	User-friendly publications (both hard copy and online) will be developed containing information on best practices in parent/ family involvement and resource information for those facing barriers. Publications will be translated into the most prevalent non-English languages spoken in Cleveland.
4	A logical, user-friendly SPO Web site will be created to provide access to current programs and resources.

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Framework

Components The 2008-2009 School Parent Organization District Plan will include the following parent/family involvement components critical to the goal of maximizing student learning:

- ❖ Communication
- ❖ Parenting
- ❖ Student Learning
- ❖ Volunteering
- ❖ School Decision-making and Advocacy
- ❖ Community Collaboration.

Objectives The six components of this plan must be addressed to reach the overall objective of improved parent/family involvement in the Cleveland Municipal School District.

Component	Objective
A. Communication	Provide opportunities for regular, meaningful, two-way communication between school and home.
B. Parenting	Promote and support effective parenting practices.
C. Student Learning	Maximize student learning and achievement.
D. Volunteering	Parents, family members and other caring adults (business partners, community and social service organizations) feel welcome in the school and their support and assistance are sought. Parents/families and the community understand that they must be involved.
E. School Decision-making and Advocacy	Involve parents/families as full partners in decisions affecting children and families.
F. Community Collaboratio	Use community resources to strengthen schools, families and student learning.

Stakeholders The following stakeholders have responsibilities (as outlined in this document) to contribute to family involvement and the success of the School Parent Organization District Plan:

- Schools
- Families
- District
- Community

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Framework Components

A. Communication

School Responsibilities Essential to the academic achievement of students, schools have the responsibility to promote regular and meaningful two-way communications between school and home.

Step	Action
1	Use a variety of accessible communication tools on a regular basis, seeking to facilitate clear, two-way interaction through each type of medium.
2	Establish opportunities for families and educators to share "partnering" information such as student strengths and learning preferences.
3	Provide clear information regarding course expectations and offerings, student placement, school activities, student services, and optional programs.
4	Mail report cards and regular progress reports to parents/families. Provide support services and follow-up conferences as needed.
5	Disseminate information on school reforms, policies, discipline procedures, assessment tools, and school goals, and involve parents/families in any related decision-making process.
6	Conduct conferences with parents/family members at least twice a year (with follow-up as needed) accommodating work schedules, languages, and child care needs.
7	Encourage immediate contact between parents/family members and teachers when concerns arise.
8	Regularly distribute student work for parental/family members' comments and review.
9	Translate communications to assist non-English speaking families.
10	Communicate with parents/families regarding positive student behavior and achievement, not just regarding misbehavior or failure.
11	Provide opportunities for parents/families to communicate with principals and other administrative staff.
12	Promote informal activities at which parents/families, staff, and community members can interact.
13	Provide staff development regarding effective communication techniques and the importance of regular two-way communication between the school and the family.
14	Respond to all parent/family member inquiries within 2 business days.
15	Develop school web sites that are easy to navigate and contain staff contact information) phone and e-mail) and times to call.

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Family Responsibilities

Families have the responsibility to inform schools of their children's needs and actively listen to suggestions given.

Step	Action
1	Provide teachers with information. (Changing family circumstances such as divorce, illness, or the death of a pet can upset a child's learning.)
2	Read all materials sent home from school.
3	Contact your child's teacher when you have a concern or question.
4	Ask the teacher to explain things in everyday language, not specialized education terms.
5	Attend open houses and parent conferences. Request a special meeting if your child's teachers change midterm
6	Find out your child's teacher phone and e-mail address, reached by a direct line or e-mail.
7	Respond to all requests for information received from school.
8	Respect your school's staff experience and broad knowledge of children.
9	Expect to disagree occasionally, and embrace the opportunity to see things from another point of view.

District Responsibilities

The District has the responsibility to provide an infrastructure and an environment that promotes communication between schools and home and sets high expectations for effective school-parent communication.

Step	Action
1	Assign Family Liaisons at each school. Some schools may have a part-time Family Liaison.
2	Establish education and training programs for family involvement.
3	Establish a Family Academy where parents learn about parenting skills and ways to help their children to increase academic achievement.
4	Develop a user-friendly District Web site and promote the development of user-friendly Web sites for schools.
5	Respond to all parent inquiries: telephone inquiries within 24 hours and written correspondence within 7 days.
6	Establish a formal, written grievance procedure for parents/families and create the structure to implement it.

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B. Parenting

School Responsibilities Schools have the responsibility to promote and support effective parenting practices.

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

Family Responsibilities Families have the responsibility to create a home that prepares children to learn.

Step	Action
1	Encourage your child to talk about feelings, accomplishments, and problems. Listen actively, reflecting back on what your child tells
2	Read books or compare notes with other parents to understand the abilities and behavior of a child the age of yours.
3	Challenge your child to do well in school; make expectations high but reasonable.
4	Tolerate mistakes as long as the child learns from the experience.
5	Model honesty and teach your child right from wrong at an early age.
6	Visit the library, museums, and educational and cultural events. Find ways to involve your child in music, sports, a new language, or other activities.
7	Read every day, by yourself and with your child.
8	Be very selective about television watching. Pay attention to the programs and the total time your child spends with TV.
9	Send your child to school on time, rested, well fed, and appropriately dressed.

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10	Know where your child is, especially your teenager.
11	Talk directly to your child about your values on drugs, alcohol, tobacco and other risky behaviors.

District Responsibilities The District has the responsibility to provide programs and establish policies that promote and support effective parenting practices.

Step	Action
1	Provide an accessible parent/family information and resource service to support schools, parents, and families that includes problem solving, resources, information about legislation affecting families, and services within the community.
2	Establish policies that support and respect family responsibilities, recognizing the variety of parenting traditions and practices within the community's cultural and religious diversity as well as the unique demands of parenting children with special needs.
3	Provide ongoing training about resources and state and federal laws to principals and families of children with special needs.
4	Collaborate with community resources (mental health, community based organizations, etc.) to provide low cost or no cost parenting classes throughout the school district during the school year.
5	Review and evaluate principals' performance as it relates to the promotion and support of effective parenting practices.

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C. Student Learning

**School
Responsibilities**

Schools have the responsibility to maximize student learning for every child and to support parents/families in their efforts to facilitate student achievement.

Steps	Action
1	Seek and encourage parent/family participation in decision-making that affects students.
2	Inform parents/families of the general expectations for (and specific progress of) students in each subject at each grade level.
3	Provide information regarding how parents can foster learning at home, give appropriate assistance and training, post homework on schools' websites and/or send information about homework, monitor homework completion, and create systems for parents/family members to provide feedback to teachers.
4	Establish a balanced homework system that includes assigning interactive homework that will require students to - involve their families and homework that students can complete independently in order to respect the demands of parenting, especially of children with special needs
5	Sponsor workshops or distribute information to assist families in understanding how students can improve skills, get help when needed, meet class expectations, and perform well on assessments.
6	Involve parents/families in setting student goals each year and in planning for post-secondary education and careers. Encourage the development of a personalized education plan for each student in which families are full partners.
7	Provide opportunities for staff members to learn and share successful approaches to engaging parents/families in their child's education.
8	Provide regular forums (open houses, workshops, etc.) for parents and teachers to share student progress, teaching methods and terminology, assessments methods, and other information (including class schedules and field trips); provide teacher contact information to families.

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Family Responsibilities Families have the responsibility to support their child’s job as a student and to model learning

Steps	Action
1	Provide a quiet atmosphere for homework; schedule a regular time for completing homework that is not too close to bedtime.
2	Understand the teacher’s methods and terminology. Try to use the same approach when you help with homework.
3	Let your child find the solution if at all possible. Give guidance, not answers.
4	Reward hard work on homework and at school with an outing, a special dinner, a book, or another recognition.
5	Ask your child questions as you read together: Can you tell me what happened in your own words? Why did the character do that? What happens next?
6	If your child is struggling, don't wait to ask the teacher for extra help or find a tutor. Seek help before the child falls far behind.
	Write letters and lists with your child. Tuck a note from you into your child's book bag.
8	Model learning; attend classes that interest you and let your child know that you value learning.

District Responsibilities The District has the responsibility to support and monitor schools in their efforts to maximize student learning.

Step	Action
1	Provide professional development for staff about learning styles, cultural competency and relevance, family involvement, and community engagement.
2	Support teacher collaboration and development of a learning community.
3	Identify and encourage culturally responsive methods of teaching and assessment including textbooks and other learning tools with culturally competent components and multi-cultural role models.
4	Provide information via website and other media about cultural competency, learning styles, tutoring, trainings, meetings, workshops, and other resources for families.
5	Publish a list of math, reading, and science programs within the District, including location, contact information, and skills addressed.
6	Create, identify, and provide supplementary materials (such as science learning kits) that include real life experiences.

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7	Encourage networking and collaboration among the schools, sharing knowledge and tools especially relevant to transitioning between grade levels.
8	Ensure consistency and continuity of forms, procedures and curricula throughout the District. Monitor adherence to standards. Ensure that district personnel are proficient on grade level expectations and standards.
9	Develop Districts with communities and community organizations; encourage pairing and mentoring of community members with families and students.
10	Establish cluster learning centers (in collaboration with community groups) with evening and/or weekend access to computers, teachers, tutoring, career guidance, etc.
11	Monitor schools to ensure that homework assignments and other class information are distributed to families and signed by family members to acknowledge receipt and understanding.
12	Establish School Parent Organization District Teams in every school to create annual family involvement work plans, facilitate home/school relationships and monitor school systemic change.
13	Provide information on progress, skill needs, assessment results, and intervention strategies early during the school year.

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D. Volunteering

School Responsibilities Schools have the responsibility to welcome parents in the school and encourage their support and assistance.

Step	Action
1	Ensure that office staff greetings, signage near entrances and any other interaction with parents create a climate in which parents feel valued and welcome.
2	Survey parents regarding their interests, talents and availability; coordinate parent resources with needs and resources within the school and among the faculty.
3	Ensure that parents who are unable to volunteer in the school building are given the options for helping in other ways (at home or place of employment).
4	Organize an easily accessible program for utilizing parent volunteers, providing ample training on volunteer procedures and school protocol.
5	Develop a system for contacting all parents to assist as the year progresses.
6	Design opportunities for those with limited time and resources to participate addressing childcare, transportation, work schedule needs, etc.
7	Show appreciation for parents' participation and value their diverse contributions.
8	Educate and assist staff members in creating an inviting climate and effectively utilizing volunteer resources.
9	Ensure that volunteer activities are meaningful and match volunteers' interests and abilities.

Family Responsibilities Families have the responsibility to find ways to contribute to the success of their children's school by helping at school or from home.

Step	Action
1	Offer to share your knowledge about your job, another culture, a craft, or a unique experience with students.
2	Help your child's teacher in the classroom (for example: listening to small groups of students read aloud).
3	Prepare materials for the classroom. Tutor a student who needs extra help
4	Help the teacher correct student papers.
5	Provide food or entertainment for holiday celebrations
6	Escort the class on a field trip or chaperone school dances.

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District Responsibilities The District has the responsibility to support and encourage volunteerism in the schools.

Step	Action
1	Install School Parent Organization Officers during the October Board of Education meeting
2	Design a standard volunteer survey form in every language spoken in the District.
3	Monitor the distribution of these surveys via the Family Liaisons and the Office of Family Life.
4	Track volunteerism throughout the district.
5	Evaluate principals based on efforts to increase volunteerism.

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E. School Decision-making and Advocacy

School Responsibilities Schools have the responsibility to include families as full partners in decisions that affect their children and their family.

Step	Action
1	Provide understandable, accessible, and well-publicized processes
2	Encourage the formation of SPO, PTAs or other parent groups to identify and respond to issues of interest to parents.
3	Involve families on all decision-making and advisory committees and ensure adequate training for such areas as policy, curriculum, budget, school reform
4	Provide parents with current information regarding school policies,
5	Enable parents to participate as partners when setting school goals,
6	Encourage and facilitate active parent participation in the decisions
7	Treat parent concerns with respect and demonstrate genuine interest in developing solutions.
8	Promote parent participation on school district, state, and national committees and issues.
9	Provide training for staff and parents on collaborative partnering and shared decision-making.

Family Responsibilities Families have the responsibility to become informed and involved in contributing to the successful performance of their child's school.

Step	Action
1	Join the school’s parent group and get to know other members. Invite others to attend, especially newcomers to the school.
2	Volunteer to serve on school decision-making committees. Attend school board meetings or campaign for the candidate of your choice.

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Step	Action
3	Join school staff members to employ best practices and meet and exceed State standards.
4	Educate yourself about school levies.
5	Ask your legislators to work for education-friendly bills.
6	Raise money for school programs and activities.
7	Organize school programs and projects that benefit families and invite the community.

District Responsibilities The District has the responsibility to ensure families are included as full partners in decisions that affect their children and their family.

Step	Action
1	Develop policies and procedures that require that parent or family members are part of each school's Building Leadership Team (BLT).
2	Develop policies and procedures that require parent and family involvement in district decision-making and advisory committees.
3	Offer trainings to parents within each region in the areas of policy, curriculum, budget, school reform initiatives, safety and personnel. Trainings should be offered at a variety of times with childcare provided.
4	Develop policies and procedures that require family involvement and input in the decisions that affect their students including student placement, course selection, and Individual Education Plan (IEP) development.
5	Develop user-friendly mechanisms for communicating training and opportunities for involvement to parents and families.
6	Implement a district-wide Parent Leadership Training program.
7	Monitor individual schools to ensure adherence to special education laws and regulations and family participation in decision-making.
8	Ensure parents of students in special education are given a voice in their children's school placement
9	Review and evaluate principals' performance based on successful implementation of the above items

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F. Collaborating with Community

School Responsibilities Schools have the responsibility to use community resources to strengthen schools, families and student learning.

Step	Action
1	Distribute information regarding cultural, recreational, academic, health, social, and other resources that serve families within the community.
2	Develop partnerships with local business and service groups to advance student learning and assist schools and families.
3	Encourage employers to adopt policies and practices that promote and support adult participation in children's education.
4	Foster student participation in community service.
5	Involve community members in school volunteer programs.
6	Disseminate information to the school community regarding school programs and performance.
7	Collaborate with community agencies to provide family support services and adult learning opportunities, enabling parents to more fully participate in activities that support education.
8	Inform staff members of the resources available in the community and strategies for utilizing those resources.

Family Responsibilities Families have the responsibility to play a role in building relationships between schools and other groups.

Step	Action
1	Ask your employer for policies such as flextime, extended lunch hours, and compressed work weeks so employees can be involved in school activities.
2	Help the school connect with community organizations and businesses.
3	Work with school administrators to find and apply for grants to further learning.
4	Organize a career fair to expose students to the range of possibilities for future jobs.
5	Thank local merchants and other business owners who support activities at school.

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Promising Practices

In-district Practices

A sampling of the Cleveland Municipal School District was surveyed to uncover the following promising practices for promoting family involvement.

Promising Practice	
1	After-school tutoring for students and English language classes for adults.
3	Using strategies for teacher outreach such as visits to student's homes.
4	New parent and new student orientation. (Example: senior parents mentoring new parents by providing transportation to meeting and other forms of support.)
5	<i>Building Leadership Teams</i> representing the diversity of the school.
6	Cultural awareness activities for parents and students including sharing personal family histories, viewing movies from and about various cultures.
7	Career fairs with representatives from a variety of cultures as role models.
8	Targeted outreach efforts, such as a, parent workshops for African-American and Latino parents, parent coaching, etc.
9	Family-friendly publications distributed in a variety of ways (via students, e-mail, etc.)
10	Mentoring programs with parent recruits.
12	Create a district-wide volunteer recruitment campaign with incentives based on the number of volunteer work hours.

Out-of-District Practices

The following school districts and models offer promising practices that may be applied in the Cleveland Municipal School District.

Model	Practice
Franklin-Pierce School District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student-led <i>Individual Student-Parent</i> (ISP) conferences. <i>Results:</i> Increased family participation. • Creation of advisories for continuous and personalized relationships • Coordination of course work, culminating project, service learning, and plan for life after school.

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Promising Practices continued

Model	Practice
Boston Public Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual parent-teacher conferences (at least two per year). • Home reading programs. • Home visits by school staff or other parents. • Math/Literacy Nights. • Policymaking/school governance committees
Federal Way Public schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Family District Office responsible for Parent Support Workshops, two-way communication, and racial equity. • Parent representatives on every school’s School Leadership Team. • Parent involvement in review committees for curriculum, safety, etc. • Appointed parent representatives on the School Board’s Community Advisory Committee.
Tacoma Public Schools	Family Involvement Center offering parenting seminars and workshops, recreational classes and child care.

Accountability

District Responsibilities

To ensure the success of the School Parent Organization District Plan, the District must implement measures to hold schools accountable for their parent involvement responsibilities. The following table outlines accountability measures that will facilitate the success of the plan described in this manuscript.

	Accountability Measures
1	District will include family involvement as part of annual principal evaluations.
2	District will require principal participation in family involvement training programs.
3	Principals must produce annual written reports demonstrating compliance with family involvement standards.
4	District will create a data recording system to track family involvement.
5	District will create a goal for family involvement at every school.
6	District will establish progressive accountability goals with the possibility of staff certification or program accreditation in family involvement

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Glossary of terms

- **Advocacy** - the action or work of supporting.
- **BLT** - Building Leadership Team
- **Collaboration** - the act of working together.
- **Curriculum** - the whole body of courses and activities offered by a school.
- **ESL, ELL** - English as a second language, English language learner.
- **Family Academy** – This program will support parents and families and will reflect awareness of and sensitivity and the diversity in the CMSD community and society.
- **Family Liaison** - each school will have a district employee to assist families and oversee family involvement activities.
- **Family Involvement Resource Service** - a call center providing information, referral, advocacy, and help to reduce barriers to involvement.
- **Governance** - the act or process of governing.
- **Infrastructure** - the basic framework of an organization.
- **Parent/Family Advisory Committee (PAC)** - a committee of parents appointed by the Superintendent to recommend uniform family involvement practices across the Cleveland Municipal School District.
- **Parent or Family** - parents, grandparents, extended family, guardians, or other persons with whom a Cleveland Municipal Public School student lives.
- **Referral Service** - a system to direct a client to the proper resource.
- **Resource Center:** a place with information, ideas, numbers, and other help.
- **School Board's Resolution No. 2003-220B** - Cleveland Municipal School District's policy to encourage and support family involvement in education at home, in our schools and communities, and in school governance.
- **SPO: School Parent Organization** - the collaborative interaction between educators and families in activities that promote student learning and positive child and youth development at home, in school, and in the community, including but not limited to regular, two-way, and meaningful communication between parents and school personal; outreach to families; parent education; volunteering; school decision making; and advocacy.
- **School-Family District Team (SFP Team)** - a group consisting of the Principal, school staff, parents or family members, and community members trained to educate and train others to develop and implement a family involvement plan.
- **Syllabus** (Syllabi, plural) - a summary outline of a course of study.

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