

District Leaders for Partnerships Guide Schools' ATPs to Strengthen Family and Community Engagement

District Leaders for Partnerships play important roles in enabling schools to develop and maintain successful programs of school, family, and community partnerships. Based on data from districts whose programs improved over time, NNPS identified six strategies that will help District Leaders for Partnerships strengthen their leadership at the district level and guide schools' ATPs to work well with their own students' families. They should *create awareness* about partnership program development, *align partnership programs with district policies*, *guide schools' ATPs to develop their programs*, *share knowledge*, *celebrate milestones*, and *document/evaluate progress*.

These strategies help district leaders move from counting the number of parents who come to a school building to helping ATPs plan, implement, evaluate, and improve activities that engage parents in ways that support student achievement and success in school. In NNPS, this starts by providing ATPs with a One-Day Team Training Workshop and guiding ATPs to write a One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships linked to specific academic, behavioral, and climate goals in their School Improvement Plans. District leaders also help ATPs address challenges to reach all parents, including those not previously engaged. The following activities reported in *Promising Partnership Practices 2012* illustrate a few ways that District Leaders for Partnerships are conducting leadership strategies.

Create Awareness

The Leader for Partnerships in **Montclair Public School District**, New Jersey, wanted schools to engage more families in their children's education, including parents whose voices had

not been heard before. She guided 11 schools to organize their partnership teams and plan their programs and goal-linked practices to increase the involvement of all students' parents in ways that contributed to student achievement and success in school. She also attended some team meetings and encouraged teams to implement the activities in their plans.

Each school posted information on the district website about its ATP members, meeting dates and times, principals' newsletters, PTA leaders, minutes from prior meetings, and school, family, and community partnership activities. In this way, the ATPs made their members and their work more "public" so that more parents and community partners were aware of partnership activities in their schools.

Pasco School District, Washington, took another approach to create awareness of their work on partnerships. District leaders and each school's ATP presented the activities in their One-Year Action Plans for Partnerships in a creative way on a *Road Map to ATP Success*. Each road showed when family and community engagement activities, meetings, and deadlines were scheduled from August through May. This reminded all stakeholders how and when they could be involved in their children's education at home or at school.

The district displayed its schedule of meetings and activities using the *Yellow Brick Road* as its theme. One school showed its path to partnerships with hot-air balloons; another created a PowerPoint of its road that ran on a TV in the main office. Another posted photos to highlight each event, as it occurred. District leaders recognized the ATPs' creativity by providing snacks for one

ATP monthly meeting for all teams that posted their *Road Maps for ATP Success* for all to see.

Guide Program Development

The School Family Partnerships (SFP) Department in **Seattle Public Schools** in Washington is strengthening its leadership on partnerships and facilitating its schools' teams. District leaders developed tools and adapted some NNPS tools to help schools' action teams organize their plans for partnerships. These included a *Family Engagement Action Team (FEAT) Checklist*, *Meeting Agenda* template, *Event Planner* template, *Evaluation of an Event*, *Year-End Report Form*, and other tools.

Seattle's leaders also produced a *Connections Newsletter* to communicate with the action teams and annual books of *Promising Practices in School Family Partnerships*. These collections showcased schools' successful family and community engagement activities and encouraged schools to learn about and borrow ideas from one another. The books also included tips for schools to keep improving their partnership programs. The newsletters and best practices are posted on the website at www.seattleschools.org.

Share Knowledge

The Core Team of district leaders for partnerships in Naperville Community School District 203 in Illinois conducted *Lunch Bunch* as a relaxed and comfortable way of bringing together the Chairs and Co-Chairs of all schools' partnership teams. The mid-year gathering was organized as a working lunch where the schools' chairs and co-chairs shared progress, described successes, and solved chal-

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Who Ya Gonna Ask?

Answers to Questions from Schools and Districts

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periodically).

- Present a short but convincing overview of the services your office will provide to their schools to develop a goal-linked partnership program connected to their school improvement plans.
- Explain the low cost of materials and high value of benefits from NNPS. Share the list of NNPS benefits and the web address so that they may explore NNPS.
- Set a date every 3 months or so to conduct a One-Day Team Training Workshop for each new set of schools that is ready to join NNPS and to attend a One-Day Team Training Workshop.
- After some schools get started, at each meeting of principals report something notable that is happening in schools with ATPs. Ask which principals are “ready” for the One-Day ATP workshop to begin planning and implementing family and community engagement activities linked to their own school improvement goals.
- This information will help principals see that new programs of family and community engagement are about *student success* – not “fluff.” Over time, more principals will see that you, as District Leader for Partnerships, are speaking for the Superintendent, that you are an expert on partnerships, and that you will be an on-going source of support for their school’s ATP. They will see that NNPS materials and evaluation services help schools improve the partnership program from year to year. The number of “ready” principals will grow.

Question from School ATPs

3. How can we engage busy parents, working parents, fathers, and “more parents” in their children’s education? (Common question phrased

differently by several ATPs in 2012.)

Everything NNPS does is to help schools engage more and different families in ways that contribute to student success and to improve outreach and results over time. The NNPS framework of *Six Types of Involvement* ensures that partnership programs engage parents in different locations—at home, at school, and in the community. Also see the column *Meeting the Challenges* in this issue about the use of emerging technologies to communicate with parents who may not be able to meet at the school building very often.

The best way to collect good ideas for increasing the involvement of working parents, fathers, and all parents—regardless of their backgrounds and special circumstances—is to review the books of *Promising Partnership Practices* each year or use the *NNPS Samplers* to explore different and productive ways of engaging parents to increase student success. The ideas-from-the-field in these publications are so inspiring to us. Every book contains excellent ideas from highly diverse communities that any ATP can use or adapt to increase family and community engagement.

Ask NNPS

You do not have to wait for UPDATE to ask questions and receive answers from NNPS. Every month, NNPS Facilitators send all members an E-Brief to share information, upcoming opportunities, and—when available—funding sources for partnership programs. The E-Briefs are periodic prompts for you to e-mail or call a Facilitator to ask questions about the challenges that face your own program of school, family, and community partnerships. As the Facilitators say: “*We are only a phone call or e-mail message away!*”

Leadership Line: District Leaders Guide Schools

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allenges to strengthen their partnership programs. The team leaders brought their lunches, shared ideas, and asked questions about upcoming activities. The district leaders provided beverages and desserts for the occasion. When time for meetings is tight, a working lunch is a good way to bring leaders together.

Align Program with Policy

District leaders for partnerships in **Greendale School District**, Wisconsin, took stock of the wellness programs in all schools and planned how to establish a “culture of wellness” throughout Greendale. An all-district activity was the *Nourish—Mind, Body, and Environment Expo 2012*, where students, staff, parents, and the community participated in activities that promoted physical, environmental, and emotional well-being.

During the year, each school’s ATP adopted wellness as one partnership goal and conducted its own activities. In *Walk and Talk*, students walked a mile and talked with a partner about a book they read—combining attention to exercise and reading. Teachers featured wellness in math and science classes, as in teaching graphing skills to document students’ hours of exercise. Elementary, middle, and high schools featured one strong activity at the Expo. For example, one school’s *Healthy Snack Contest* winner was featured at the Expo. School PTOs and the Health Department organized a *Fun Run/Walk* fundraiser. There were 771 registrants.

These and other examples of district leadership activities link to one or more of the NNPS leadership strategies.

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