



Red Carpet Treatment™

welcoming atmosphere walk-through

Project Appleseed™
the national campaign for public school improvement



Entrance to Webster Groves High School, St. Louis, MO

Can your school be so welcoming, so inviting, and so comfortable that every person who walks through the doors believes they are about to have an amazing experience?

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Red Carpet Acknowledgement

The [Red Carpet Treatment](#) tool is our family friendly walk through process and it is part of the Parental Involvement Toolbox. It is a tool to provide schools with 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. Our guide has five different sections that focus on different aspects of engaging parents and families:

- ESSA Title I Family Engagement
- Physical Environment
- School-wide Practices & Policies
- Welcoming School Staff
- Communication

The Fairfax (Virginia) County Public Schools' Parenting Education Center (PEC) developed the Red-Carpet Treatment process as the "Welcoming Atmosphere Walk Through" to address schools' desire to increase parent involvement. Project Appleseed adapted the Walk Through form editions developed by Fairfax County Public Schools, the Institute for Responsive Education (IRE) and the South Dakota Department of Education for use in any school.



District/School Policies and Compacts

Title I District Policy for Parent and Family Engagement

What is Title I?

In 1994 Project Appleseed advised the White House on the creation of the first parental involvement provisions of [Title I](#) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) serves as the latest reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) which was last reauthorized in 2002 as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Since its inception, the intent of the law has been to raise achievement for low-income and otherwise disadvantaged children. Parent and family engagement and consultation are a key piece of the law, focused on the low income parents of “Title I-participating” children. We know that gaps in educational opportunity and achievement will only be remedied when those closest to the affected students – parents, families, and communities – are driving decision making.

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 like Project Appleseed's [Parental Involvement Pledge](#) 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 – like Project Appleseed! Project Appleseed's Parental Involvement Toolbox contains **the Parental Involvement Pledge**, [Parental Involvement Report Card](#) and a program designed for educators and parent leaders who strive to supersize and mobilize family engagement to improve student outcomes. Each Toolbox' Parental Involvement Pledge and **Parental Involvement Report Card** (both print and online versions) are branded with each school's logo's for distribution to every student and family. Schools organize parent responsibility with an effective model that is research-based, meets district, state and **Title I ESSA** mandates. 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.



Introduction

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 Red Carpet Treatment 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 Red Carpet Treatment?

The Red Carpet Treatment is a tool 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 Red Carpet Treatment will provide ideas and strategies that will make the school more inviting and welcoming to families and community members.

What is the Red-Carpet Treatment?

- The action team will coordinate a tour of your school.
- The team will look at the elements of the school that let parents and community members know they are welcomed partners in the school
- Based on their observations, the team will complete a Red Carpet Treatment Commendation/Recommendation Form highlighting the welcoming aspects of your school.

What is the purpose of the Red-Carpet Treatment?

- Each school has different goals it hopes to achieve as a result of this walk-through. Purposes could include the following: examining how inviting the school appears to its diverse community, looking at strategies that can be employed to make the school more inviting to the families and community, and trying to increase parent involvement.

What are the components of the Red-Carpet Treatment?

- The **Physical Environment**: parking areas, classrooms, lobby, hallways, etc.
- **School-wide Practices & Policies**: interview with principal/administrative staff.
- **Welcoming School Staff**: observations in the main office, hallways, and places open to the public; listen and look for inviting friendly tones.
- **Communication**: digital and print newsletters, parent handbook, flyers, and other materials distributed by the school. Web sites and telephone message lines are also included, when applicable.

Who is involved?

A team of people conduct the Red-Carpet Treatment. 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! (An employee 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 Red-Carpet Treatment 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, Reach out and involve the school custodian, a secretary, a bus driver, a cafeteria worker, a neighbor, a community leader, and/or others who represent the various cultures in your school community. If you can, use the services of a facilitator to assist in the coordination of the team.

Red Carpet Procedure

A Red-Carpet Treatment can take between 90 minutes and 2 hours to conduct depending on the size of the school and team. The discussion between all participants is the key to the success of the Red-Carpet Treatment process! The facilitator should ensure that everyone feels comfortable and engaged in this process. Here are the easy steps for facilitating a successful Red-Carpet Treatment: Facilitator and Action Team will do the following:

1. Plan and schedule the walk-through with a school contact person.
2. Prepare walk-through packets for each team member.
3. Select the participants for the walk-through.
4. Send the names to the principal/principal.
5. Participants meet and Introductions are made (nametags always a great idea!)
6. Have the principal explain their vision/mission for family engagement at their school and how the Red-Carpet Treatment might help.
7. Divide the participants into component teams.
8. Distribute checklist packet.
9. 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.
10. Review the participant Instructions with the team.
11. Facilitate the briefing, walk-through, and debriefing.
12. Have the team identify commendations/recommendations based upon their tour and discussion.
13. Write a summary of the team’s observations, commendations, and recommendations.
14. Send the walk-through summary to the school principal.
15. Follow-up with the school to discuss next steps.

How art teacher knowledge can help with students running in hallways





School is asked to do the following before the Walk -Through:

1. Provide a meeting room large enough for your team members.
2. Provide a space for each of the four component teams to meet and talk separately. This could be the same room as #1 with teams moving to separate corners.
3. Provide the name of the administrator who will be interviewed.
4. Provide a map of the school.
5. Collect samples of all written material sent to parents/families from your school, i.e., a parent/student handbook, two recent newsletters, a student directly, a packet of materials for new students and families.
6. Provide all telephone numbers, including message lines, through which families and community members can contact the school. A team member will call those numbers before the actual walk-through.
7. Provide any information needed to access your web site, if available.
8. In order to expedite the walk-through process, send the information listed above to the action team contact person at least one week prior to your walk-through.

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



General Instructions and Guidelines for all Components

Thank you for being apart of your school's Red-Carpet Treatment Team. Your input will be helpful in making future visitors to the building feel a welcomed part of the school. As you participate in the walk-through today, please think about the things that way "Welcome!" to you when you enter a school.

Try to assume a role as a visitor new to the school. Look at your school from any or all of the following perspectives:

- You are a parent of a child who will go to kindergarten next fall.
- You are thinking about moving into the area.
- You are a first-time volunteer.
- You just moved here from another state.
- You just moved from another area within this state.
- You know a little English.
- You are a father.
- You just moved to the USA.
- You have difficulty walking.
- You have difficulty seeing.
- You are a neighbor of the school.

During today's walk-through, you will become a member of one of four Red-Carpet Treatment Component Teams. These teams will examine the following elements:

- The Physical Environment
- School-wide Practices and Policies
- Welcoming School Staff
- Written Materials

In order to remember your thoughts during the walk-through process, please put your name at the top of your individual Red-Carpet Treatment Commendations and Recommendations Form and make notes about the following:

- What is your school doing well?
- What could your school do to make the school more welcoming for parents and visitors?

At the conclusion of the walk-through time period, each Component Team will discuss its observations and complete the Commendation and Recommendation Form that has been provided for the team.

The entire team will then gather to share each Component Team's findings.

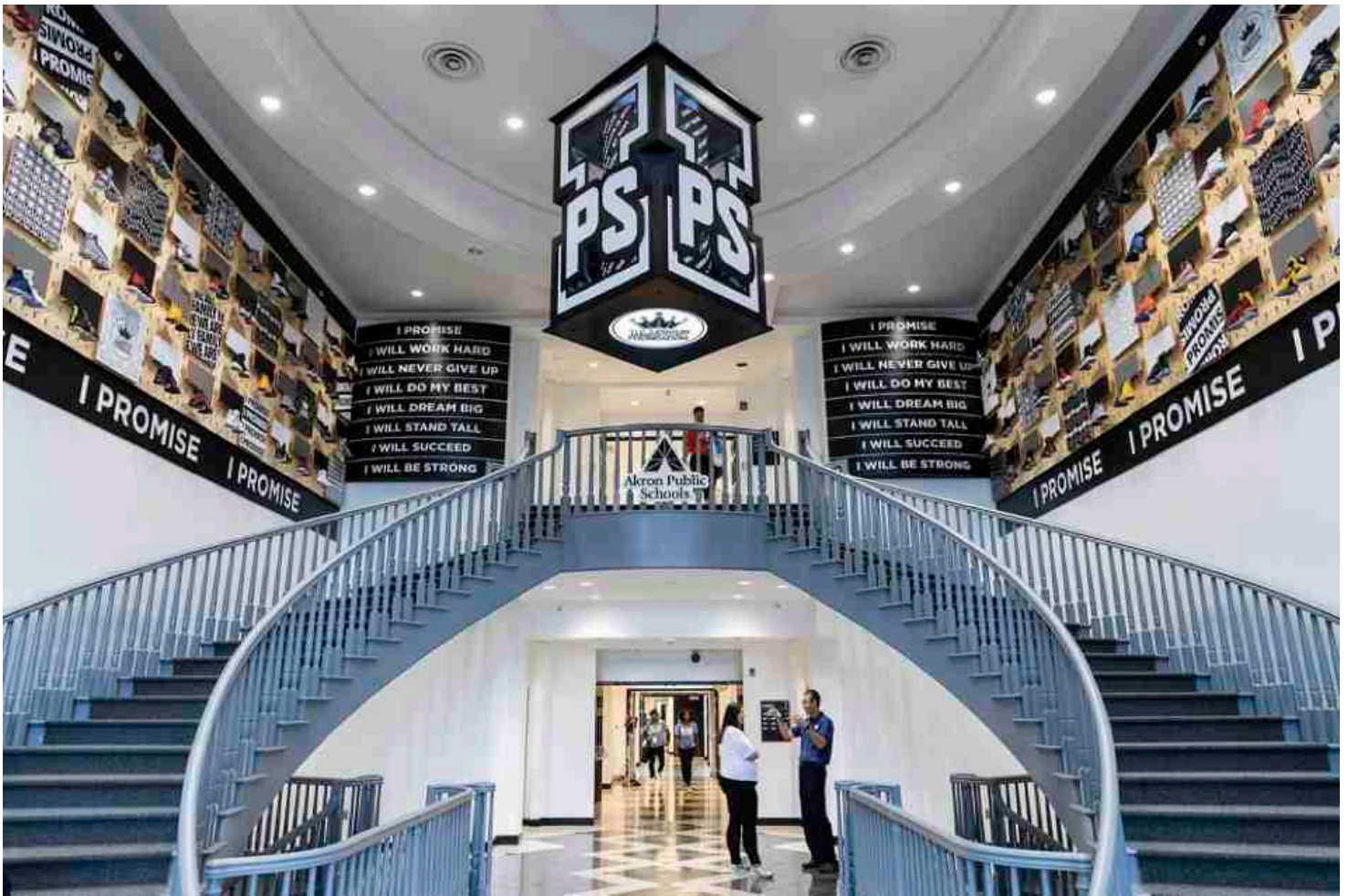
When all Component Teams have shared their observations, the reports will be collected by the facilitator for compilation. The facilitator will send a summary report of the observations to the action team (if this is part of an action research project) and to the school administration within one week of the observation.



Walk-Through Timeline Sample

Depending on the starting time for your school, the following is a time schedule for the activity. It is generally recommended to conduct the walk-through at the start of the school day.

8:30 – 8:35	Welcome – Principal
8:35 - 8:45	Purpose and Objectives Description and Directions for Walk-Through
8:45 – 8:50	Component Teams meet for Directions
8:50 – 9:15	Walk-Through
9:15 – 9:30	Component Team Discussions Complete Commendation Forms
9:30 – 9:55	Reporting to the Large Group
9:55 – 10:00	Wrap-up and Next Steps



I Promise School is a public elementary school in Akron, Ohio, opened in 2018, supported by the LeBron James Family Foundation, and specifically aimed at at-risk children. Opening with students attending grades three and four, the school will be fully operational by 2022, eventually teaching grades one through eight.

Component **A**: The Physical Environment

The physical appearance of the facility is an essential element in creating a welcoming atmosphere. Your Component Team will tour the school's entrances, offices, hallways, cafeteria, gym, library, clinic, work rooms, computer labs, and a sampling of classrooms.

Physical Environment

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

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.

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.

Component A: The Physical Environment

The physical appearance of the facility is an essential element in creating a welcoming atmosphere. Your Component Team will tour the school's entrances, offices, hallways, cafeteria, gym, library, clinic, work room, computer lab, and a sampling of classrooms.

While you and your teammates are touring the building, please consider the items listed below. Be sure to make notes so you will be able to discuss your observations and complete the Commendations and Recommendations Form with your teammates at the conclusion of your tour.

- There are clear directions from all entrances to the main door.
- The hours that the building and office are open are clearly noted on the front door.
- Signs giving clear directions to the main office are posted near the front entrance and at other entrances.
- A welcome sign is displayed near the entrance in more than one language
- There are friendly, clear instructions for all visitors to sign in at the office and obtain a building pass.
- A guest book is kept in the main office for guests to sign when they come into the school.
- When entering the school, visitors can pick up a badge that says "Parent" or "Volunteer". Rather than visitor, indicating that the school considers them to be especially important.
- There is a school directory near the front entrance
- A school map is displayed near the entrance that highlights frequently requested locations.
- There is a bulletin board on which parents can post and receive news and announcements. Other bulletin boards thank volunteers, the PTA, and community members for their contributions.
- Pictures, photos, bulletin boards, showcases, and displays reflect the faces of the school's children and their families, including cultural, racial, and linguistic diversity and a variety of family structures.
- Bulletin Boards and displays throughout the building are student-oriented, colorful, and well- maintained.
- There is a place where visitors can comfortably sit to chat, read available resources, prepare materials for teachers, etc.

Component **A: The Physical Environment**

Commendations: **What is working**

Recommendations:
How to make your school more welcoming

	Can be done with few Resources	Needs Resources	Needs further planning

Component A: The Physical Environment

Commendations: What is working

- Murals in the cafeteria
- Signs in different languages

Recommendations:

How to make the school more welcoming

	Can be done with few Resources	Needs Resources	Needs further planning
Signs – You may want to consider adding directional signs inside all entrances to direct visitors to the main office. (Signs that say, “Visitors please report to the office” not just directions.) You may also wish to place a large sign, with nice land- scaping, outside the school directing people to the main door. The current sign above the main entrance is too high to see but could be moved lower. Also, a sign with the school’s name outside the building would assure parents and visitors they are in the right place.	Little needed except landscaping and outside sign	For signs and landscaping	
A welcome banner in different languages would be nice particularly near the main office.	Could be made by Art Teacher		
Post office hours at the different entrances.	XX		
Place school maps with you are here notations in visible locations through-out the school.	XX		
Create a parent bulletin board.	XX		
Create different badges; parent & volunteer	XX		
Reserve some parking spaces for parents and visitors.	XX		



Component **B**: School-wide Practices & Policies

School-wide practices and policies can enhance or undermine a welcoming atmosphere. Your Component Team will interview the school's principal.





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

America is becoming more diverse each year. As the demographics of our nation 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

Component B: School-wide Practices and Policies

School-wide practices and policies can enhance or undermine a welcoming atmosphere. Your Component Team will interview the school's principal/chief administrator and ask the questions listed below. Please take notes so you will be able to discuss his/her answers and complete the Commendations and Recommendations Form with your teammates at the conclusion of the interview.

- Is an orientation program provided for families?
- Do you provide information packets for new families?
- Do teachers call each student's family early in the school year to report something positive?
- Does your school provide informal/social occasions when parents and staff can get to know each other during the school year?
- What alternative communication methods are used with parents speaking limited English in order for them to understand the curriculum and participate in activities?
- Is information about school and classroom policies, school rules, parent-teacher conferences, and bus and lunch schedules available to parents in their languages? How is this information provided?
- Do you assist parents in choosing appropriate educational programs for their children? Describe.
- What resources do you have available for parents to gain access to information about events and curricula?
 - Internet
 - Email
 - Text messages
 - Voice mailboxes
 - Homework hotline
 - Teacher message boxes
 - Event line
 - Videos
 - Other
- Is special attention paid to pronouncing parents' names correctly?
- Do you have a resource file of bilingual speakers in the school who can be called upon to translate or become a "buddy family" if needed?
- Are parent leaders kept informed about important school matters and encouraged to form a parent network to pass the word?
- Do you have a way to communicate regularly with non-custodial parents?
- Does the community use the school for planned events? How?
- Do you invite the community to participate in the school in specific ways? How?

Component B: School-wide Practices and Policies

Commendations: What is working

- Social events for families are well-attended
- Outreach to multicultural families: International Back to School Night and formation of a multicultural committee of parents who outreach to others
- Diverse faculty: available to translate and enrich the curriculum and strong awareness of diversity issues.
- Effective partnerships with several community groups

Recommendations:

How to make the school more welcoming

	Can be done with few Resources	Needs Resources	Needs further planning
Translate welcome packets for school five major languages.	Send to Language Office		
Hold monthly orientations for new families, with interpreters as needed.	Could use certified translators		
Invite businesses in the area to contribute to welcome packets for orientations.	XX		
Include parents and community members when planning for improved phone system	XX		
Recruit additional community groups to serve as partners for mentoring	XX		



Component **C**: Welcoming School Staff

The attitudes of the staff members, including teachers, aides, office staff, etc. are an essential element in creating a welcoming atmosphere. Your Component Team will quietly observe the school staff, watch their behavior, and listen to their interactions with the adults who call or visit the building.

Component C: Welcoming School Staff

The attitudes of the staff members are an essential element in creating a welcoming atmosphere. Your Component Team will quietly observe, the school staff, watch their behavior, and listen to their interactions with the adults who call or visit the building.

While you and your teammates are touring the building please, consider the items listed below. Be sure to take notes so you will be able to discuss your observations and complete the Commendations and Recommendations Form with your teammates at the conclusion of your tour.



You may want to use tally marks to indicate the number of staff members observed and the number of times you observed a particular behavior. For example, when six staff members passed a parent in the hall, two asked if s/he could be helped, three did not acknowledge the parent at all, and one looked at the parent and smiled.

- The office staff greets visitors quickly with a smile and in a friendly, courteous way. Staff, teachers, and students answer the telephone in a friendly, professional way.
- Prompt attention is given to telephone calls and messages, inviting two-way communication.
- When a person with limited English proficiency calls, the staff member answering the phone is very patient and attempts to find someone who can speak his/her language or refers him/her to a phone number or person who can help.
- When an irate parent calls, the staff member answering the phone remains calm, listens attentively and attempts to solve the problem or find someone who can.
- There is a suggestion box where parents and other visitors can contribute ideas.
- Staff members passing in the hall acknowledge visitors with a smile, a nod or a hello.
- When a Component C Team member walks through the hallway without a badge or pass, staff members approach him/her politely and cordially, but firmly invite/escort him/her to the office to sign in.
- One Component C Team member asks a staff member this question: “Will you please tell me where to find an adult bathroom I can use?”.

Component C: Welcoming School Staff

Commendations: What is working

- Some staff members passing visitors in the hall acknowledge them with a nod, smile, or hello.
- Visitors are given clear directions to adult bathrooms.

Recommendations:

How to make your school more welcoming

	Can be done with few Resources	Needs Resources	Needs further planning
Office staff could more closely reflect the language and ethnic diversity of the school.	XX		
Consider reducing the size of the counter near the outside entrance to the main office so staff can see and greet visitors as they enter.	XX		
The entire staff is encouraged to acknowledge all visitors with a nod, smile, hello & "May I help you?"	XX		
Sign-in notebooks can be made more inviting, with clearer directions for signing, a more attractive look, and easy accessibility for signing of visitors, volunteers, and others. Many schools use separate sign-in for visitors, parents and others. Provide sign- in sheets in different languages and use symbols, in addition to words, to make information clearer.	XX		



School-to-home,
Home-to-school
Communication

Component **D** : COMMUNICATION

A more welcoming atmosphere is created when the communication sent home from the school are clear, understandable, and meaningful to parents and others reading them. Your Component Team will review the communication materials distributed by the school – both written and digital.



Six Slices of Parental Involvement

3. Communicating

Our Goal: Design more effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications to reach all families each school year with information about school programs and their children's progress.

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.

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



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.
- 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.

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

Component **D**: Communication

A more welcoming atmosphere is created when the communication sent home from the school are clear, understandable, and meaningful to parents and others reading them. Your Component Team will review the communication distributed by the school.

While you and your teammates review the school's handbooks, newsletters, directories, calendar of school events, web sites, flyers, and other printed and digital materials, please consider the items listed below. Be sure to take notes so you will be able to discuss your observations and complete the Commendations and Recommendations Form with your teammates at the conclusion of your review.



- All printed and digital materials are clear and understandable to someone who is new to the school.
- The printed and digital materials are free of educational jargon.
- A variety of school programs are highlighted, including special education, music programs, general education, English as a Second Language, etc.
- There is obvious collaboration with the school's PTA/PTO and other parent groups.
- There is obvious collaboration with the community.
- Photographs and articles in the publications mirror the diversity of the student body.
- Parent and community volunteers are recognized – eg. National Parental Involvement Day and Public School Volunteer Week
- New students and their families are officially welcomed.
- Articles about staff members, volunteers, students, and their families appear in the publications.
- Student work is highlighted in the publications.
- Acronyms are explained (such as PTA means parent teacher association).
- The school's educational and extra-curricular programs are explained.
- Translated publications are readily available and distributed to families who have been identified as needing them.
- The printed and digital materials use a font that is easy to read and are neat and clean to look at.

Component **D**: Communications

Commendations: What is working

- School tries to send home materials translated into Spanish and other languages whenever possible.
- The newsletter is welcoming in tone, features the diverse student population, highlights academic achievement, and mentions support available to encourage student success.
- The spirit of volunteerism is evident.
- School directories includes student, parent, and community information.

Recommendations:

How to make your school more welcoming

	Can be done with few Resources	Needs Resources	Needs further planning
It might be useful if materials in the first day XX packet were organized into two categories: "For information only" and "Please sign and return to school." A list of items to be returned clipped to those specific items would be helpful.	XX		
You might want to consider a certain color XX paper for PTA information to make it easily identifiable. The PTA information is excellent but could be made more inviting with an invitation to join in PTA sponsored activities.	XX		
The parent information in the student XX handbook might be reorganized for better parent reference. The important telephone numbers would fit on the first page.	XX		
It would be useful to include the telephone XX numbers of someone who speaks Spanish or Vietnamese to encourage more volunteering.	XX		
There was concern about the timeliness of XX translations for parents.	XX		



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