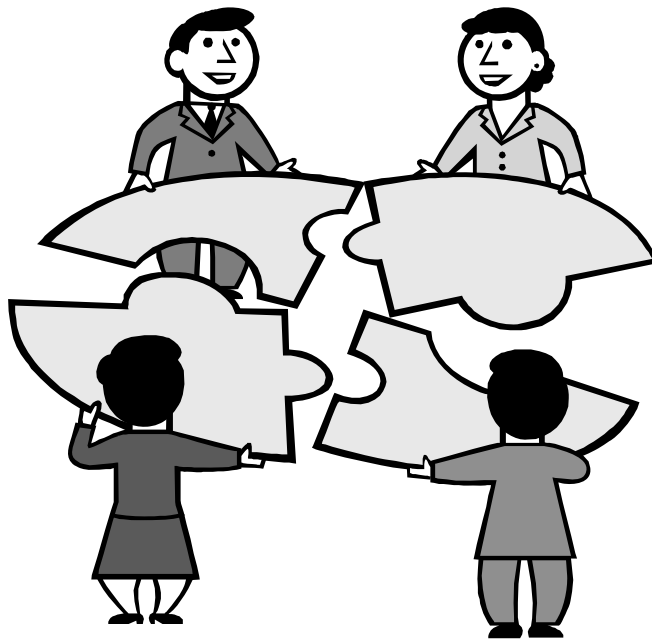


# Family Involvement Building Community Partnerships



A partnership guide for families, schools, service agencies, and policy makers focused on improving outcomes for our children.

# Weaving Bright Futures for Children

It seems like everywhere we go someone is saying “We can make a difference if families are involved.” Today’s schools, health care providers, early intervention agencies, families and policy makers are talking about “family involvement”. They are asking many questions. What is family involvement? How much time will it take? Who is responsible? How will family involvement fit with everything else we’re expected to do? Perhaps the most important question of all is: *Will family involvement help our children?*

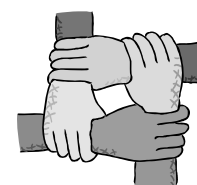
*The answer to that question is yes!* Research shows that family involvement improves outcomes for our children and provides opportunities for lifelong success as adults. If we want today’s children to be thinking, healthy, well-adjusted adults and productive citizens of tomorrow’s communities, then we need to spend time building partnerships for this to happen. These partnerships must value every individual who plays a role in a child’s life. Families, schools, health care providers, service agencies, businesses and policy makers must listen to one another’s perspectives to make a difference for children.



Consider the similarities between weaving blankets that stand the test of time and creating supportive environments that help our children to thrive. The systems, services and families in our children’s lives are strands of thread. Partnerships weave these strands to insure that our children are well prepared for the future. They will succeed, if we believe the adults in their lives have something worthwhile to give regardless of economic status, language, culture or disability. Family involvement becomes a natural way of life when families are welcomed as partners.

We can improve outcomes one child at a time then one community at a time, and before we know it, one system at a time. As partners, we may need to put aside old assumptions and restructure priorities. We may need to adapt activities or come up with new ideas. Like any partnership, this journey will have challenges but it will also have rewards. It is worth the time and effort. When everyone is focused on common goals, we can become weavers of the future. The outcomes will be amazing!

This booklet celebrates the success of family involvement that is happening in our state. It also offers ideas, resources and hope for what is yet to come. Although many of the resources and strategies in this book highlight schools and the education system, the ideas can be applied to the network of systems in our communities. We thank each person who shared their story, contributed suggestions or offered their time in reviewing this book.



*We dedicate this book to the memory of Patricia Siquieros who inspired so many.*

Parents Reaching Out builds family leadership in New Mexico through grants from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Innovation and Improvement as the Parent Information and Resource Center (PIRC); the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs as the Parent Training and Information Center (PTIC); and the federal Maternal and Child Health Bureau as Family to Family Health Information Center F2FHIC. Our work is also funded by grants from the New Mexico Department of Education and the New Mexico Department of Health. However, the contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the US Department of Education and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

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## *What will I learn from this book?*

It is our hope that each person who reads this book will discover that family involvement provides rich resources to improve outcomes for our children. Our book is designed to be used as a tool identify needs and develop plans that address the growing emphasis placed on parent involvement at the local, state and national level. Parents Reaching Out has used portions of this booklet as we worked with families, school districts and other agencies over the past few years. The positive responses we have received, the questions asked and the results reported in communities have inspired us to share what we have learned.

Research tells us that it is time to move beyond thoughts that family involvement takes place when parents do as they are told or when they help raise money for the school. It is time to tap the collective ideas of all stakeholders (policy makers, schools, providers, businesses and families) to create meaningful family involvement programs that are as diverse as the families that make up the great state of New Mexico. Parents Reaching Out wants to join you as a partner in this process.

As we explore family involvement, our journey holds challenges and possibilities. We hope that each stakeholder gains new insight and a deeper understanding of the part they play in this process.

**Policy makers:** Family leadership/involvement can go beyond reading to your child or making sure their homework is done. It is parents being involved in schools or systems as active partners. Parent partners should be at the table when policies and procedures are being developed. This can only happen when family involvement is supported and funded by the legislature, school board or other policy making body as a critically needed activity.

**Families:** Parent involvement happens in many different forms. It can and should be the time families spend reading to children and making sure their homework is done. It can go very far beyond that as well. It can be membership on the parent advisory council at your child's school to help develop family friendly policies and practices. It may lead to connecting with other families who are making a difference in this state.

**Administrators and other Professionals:** Families can be involved in many ways and can participate in supporting their children to achieve their potential. They need also to understand family involvement is not rocket science. It begins with an open mind and visionary leadership that involves taking risks on new journeys to avoid the barriers of past assumptions. It takes a steadfast willingness to let others share in decision-making.

**Educators:** Involved families improve educational results and the way it is accomplished is to develop relationships through good home/school communication. Families need to feel like they *belong* to the school community and are *competent* to share in decision-making. Families need to see the *useful* role they play in their child's success.

We invite all stakeholders to consider Parents Reaching Out as a resource and partner in developing successful family involvement programs. Each year, we work with over 54,000 families and 34,000 professionals. Family involvement is what we do and we do it well. We can help.

# Family Involvement and Leadership

What is high quality family involvement? First, we must realize that family involvement comes in many forms and is just as individual as the families that shape a community. It may begin through parent to parent conversations about making an informed decision about needed services or questions to ask a family physician or child's teacher. It is a continual learning process of gathering information, tapping resources and knowing about choices.



Family leadership is a process that takes place over time as families gain confidence in sharing ideas that will in turn, help others understand their perspective and respect their point of view. It means linking with neighbors and community groups, participating in workshops or connecting with policy makers at a conference. Leadership roles take families beyond their home to find out the facts, listen to others and work for changes to help their child, their family and their community.

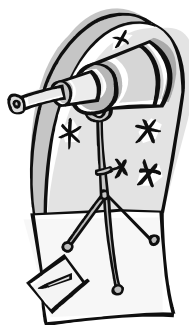
An invitation to participate is a starting place for family involvement, as long as we remember that families need to be informed to be able to be involved as equal members in an activity. Family leadership really begins as a family learns about things that are important to them. Those who become involved in shaping systems generally start learning because of a personal need for service. These families become involved in the “bigger picture” as they attend trainings, gather information and make connections. Family involvement is a continuum of time, learning and participation.

Family involvement is much more than a collection of signatures on a sign-in sheet. Just saying “we had families involved in this process” is not a valid measure of quality family involvement. Parents are only tokens when they fill seats in the crowd without knowing why they are there or do not have the opportunity to express their ideas. *Meaningful involvement values all stakeholders and improves results for our children and young adults.*

We know from experiences shared by parents across the state that successful family involvement often begins in the family centered approach used by early childhood providers. Their stories tell us that families have a much better chance of success with a good start. Families who received the support and consistency when their children were young were more likely to participate in family leadership activities when the time was right. This level of empowerment transfers to other systems and continues to improve outcomes for children as they grow and learn skills to become successful young adults. **Remember, start early, end well!**

*In the words of a parent . . . “I have learned that one of the best things we can do for our children is to become informed and educated about services that are available. Early childhood programs are wonderful systems designed to ensure that our little ones get their best start in life. And believe me, I have seen this firsthand! The progress that my little girl has made has been amazing. A major part of early intervention is that family members are partners or team members working together with a variety of professionals.”*

## Look for the Positives!



Family involvement is about choices and opportunities. It is personal and specific to each of the families living in the diverse communities throughout New Mexico. Any person that works with families must remember to listen to them in an effort to understand and respect where they are in their lives. As we make connections, we can ask questions to find out what makes the best sense to each family. It is not our place to judge families or their ability to become involved. We must cast aside our previous experiences with families in similar situations and not assume that we “know”. Our job is to provide information, support and encouragement so that each family can choose the level of involvement that is a good fit for them.

Parents Reaching Out connects with families every day and we have gained new perspectives that are worth sharing. We have discovered that there’s no crystal ball to help us predict which families choose to get involved. A family may appear to have the time and the skills to take part in a parent panel, but when we ask we find that this isn’t something they’re ready to do. Another family may appear to have too much going on in their life. They hear our invitation and say, “Yes, we’ll be there. How can we help?” Without the opportunity or the invitation to be involved, they might be still sitting on the sidelines. We’ve learned to be open to all possibilities!

Assumptions about families often stand in the way of our efforts to get them involved. We won’t move forward if our thoughts are clouded by assumptions about poverty, disability, single parenthood, level of education or culture. Our partnerships for children will never get off the ground. We need to see and treat each other as *people first!* We need to search for the gifts that people have within themselves and value them as individuals. We all like to feel needed. That sense of belonging builds self-esteem, gives us ownership and sparks passion for what we do.

As communities move forward to encourage family involvement and promote family leadership, we will need to learn to listen and watch for opportunities to get families involved. Most of all, we must not judge others. We must give families the tools they need. We must have high expectations and believe that they will become involved when the time is right. We need to be alert for when that time comes.



The only way to know when families are ready to be involved is to stay connected and provide a range of opportunities to participate in the partnership.

“There are many reasons for developing school, family, and community partnerships. They can improve school programs and school climate, provide family services and support, increase parents’ skills and leadership, connect families with others in the school and in the community, and help teachers with their work. However, the main reason to create such partnerships is to help all youngsters succeed in school and in later life. When parents, teachers, students, and others view one another as partners in education, a caring community forms around students and begins its work.”

Dr. Joyce Epstein, “Caring for the Children We Share”

# Keys to Encouraging Family Involvement



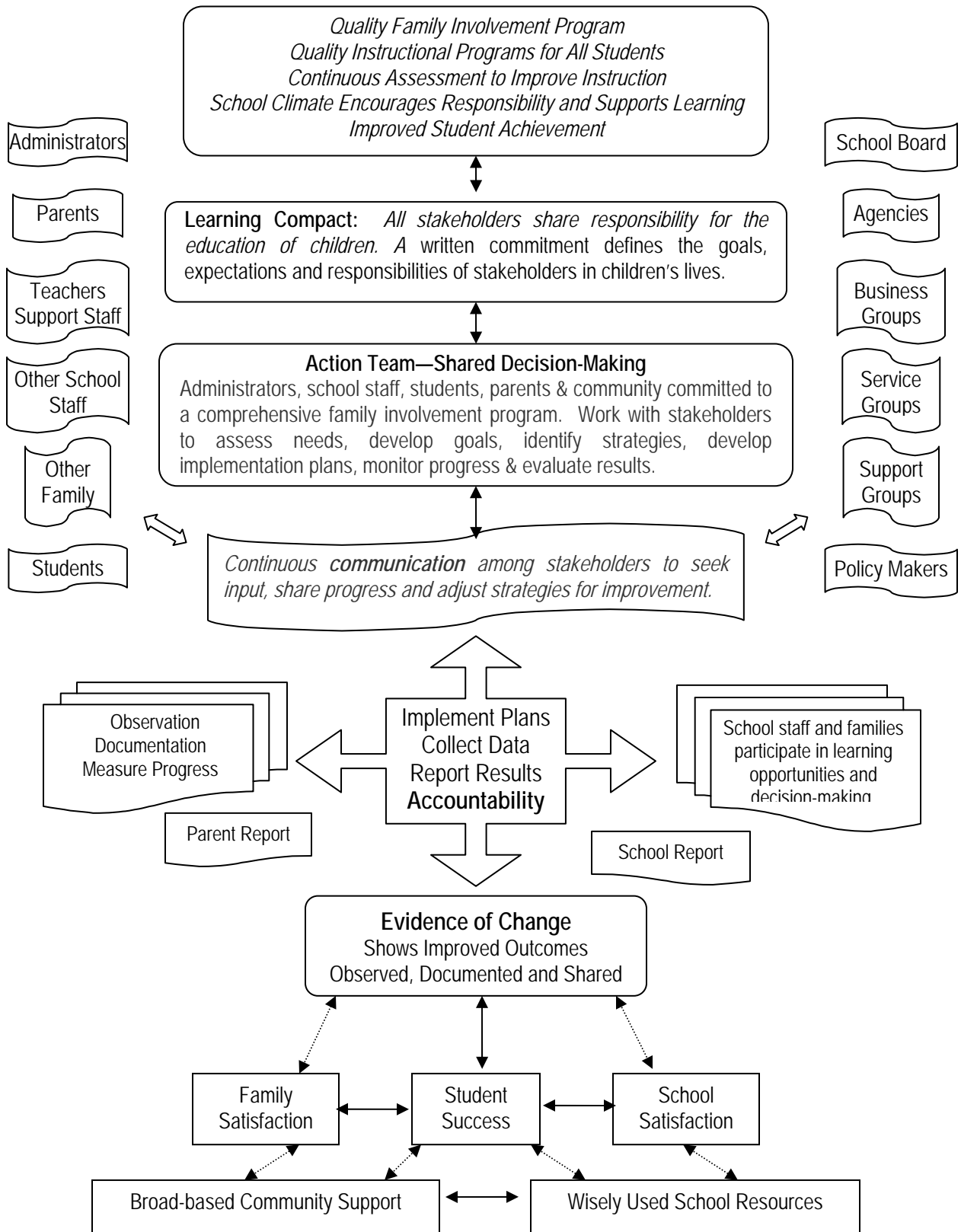
*TIME has become the new currency for the Twenty First Century.  
We must learn to make each moment count.*

- 🔑 **Listen** - We must learn to listen for the family's interests, resources and their ability to commit time.
- 🔑 **Follow-up** – It just takes a minute to stay in touch with someone. It might be a phone call note or e-mail that let's that person know you're thinking about them. It is the key to developing relationships. Planned follow-up offers consistency and shows that you care. It also keeps everyone on track and involved.
- 🔑 **Urgency** - We must strive to help families keep a sense of urgency. Time is of the essence. It is too precious to take for granted. Waiting until tomorrow does not get the job done.
- 🔑 **Passion** - If we are passionate and driven in our commitment to family involvement, then it will come through in our message. Passion is contagious.
- 🔑 **Stay Connected** - If someone commits to a type of involvement, we must be willing to take them up on their offer or they will find another place to spend their time. A list of volunteers has no value if those on the list are never contacted.
- 🔑 **Develop Contact Lists** - We need comprehensive lists so that we have the ability to make the right connections. As family involvement connections grow, categories of interest will begin to surface that can be useful in developing action groups based on specific focus areas or issues.
- 🔑 **Use Phone Trees** – We can connect one person to another by location and/or similar interests. It is one of the quickest ways to get the word out.
- 🔑 **Link Families through E-Mail** – If families have internet service, e-mail is a way to keep like-minded people connected and a quick way to get the word out.

"Experience has shown that language minority families do care deeply about their children's schooling. What is required is for educators to act as partners in education with these and other families, recognizing the important contributions that all families can make to the schools and to their children's success."

"E. Violand-Sanchez; C. P. Sutton; H.W. Ware, 1991  
Fostering Home-School Cooperation Involving Minority Families as Partners in Education"

# A Vision for Engaging Families as School Partners





# How Do Families Get Involved in Schools?

Even though selling popcorn at lunch time or putting up posters about a fundraising activity are worthwhile activities, parent involvement is more than that. It is about being a full-fledged partner in the decision making process that helps build effective systems. The suggestions below are focused on schools, but the ideas can be springboards for action planning in other systems.

## **Parents can work together with their schools to promote effective programs and policies.**

1. Sharing their ideas and constructive solutions to issues to help write or revise the Title 1 plan, develop the Parent Compact or other components of school programs.
2. Developing high standards for all students by volunteering to participate on a curriculum committee to provide a parent perspective.
3. School planning by representing parents on the School Improvement Team, either at the school or district level.

## **Parents can involve themselves with their schools through a variety of activities.**

1. Joining the school's parent organization [Parent Teacher Association (PTA), Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), Parent Teacher Club (PTC)].
2. Offering to serve on the School EPSS Team (Educational Plan for Student Success), local IDEA advisory, Action Team, or other school committees.
3. Volunteering in classrooms/after school activities. Tutoring children in specific content areas. Sharing job skills, craftsmanship or tools of your trade as children explore careers.
4. Attending open houses and parent teacher conferences on a regular basis.
5. Contacting teachers/counselors by phone or note or e-mail to discuss status of your child.
6. Attending board meetings on a regular basis.
7. Reading all communication sent home from school (newsletter, etc.).
8. Working with school personnel for your child's academic success:
  - a. Building self-confidence
  - b. Positive/negative reinforcement to build motivation.
  - c. Setting goals. Reinforcing study skills and developing responsibility.
  - d. Checking homework for quality. Signing and returning report cards, nightly agendas or assignments as part of the school's goal to promote parent involvement.
9. Attending workshops when they are offered.
10. Joining groups that promote specific short term projects (campus beautification, health & fitness fairs, math & science nights, family literacy events).
11. Seeking service organizations and local merchants to join in a school to work program if offered by the schools.



Adapted from "The Partnership for Family Involvement in Education" program materials  
(U.S. Department of Education website at <http://www.pfie.ed.gov/>)

# How Do Families Get Involved in Their Community?

Here are some examples of family involvement and leadership taking place in communities throughout New Mexico. (In the interest of privacy, some names have been changed.)

- Lucy has made “homework time” a priority in her family. She has three children and they all know that homework comes before TV time. They gather at the kitchen table after supper so that she can spend time with them to answer questions or check their work.
- Carmen invited families in her neighborhood to a parent support group in her home. Her teenage daughter cared for the children in their backyard, so that moms and dads had time to visit and share ideas or concerns. The group now meets once a month and they support each other to make informed decisions for their child’s health care, education or other needs.
- June committed her time to serve on a Governor’s committee focused on education issues with using the encouragement and tools provided by Parents Reaching Out.
- James and Amanda have made connections with Parents Reaching Out for several years and now assist families and give presentations. They attend workshops and work with local leaders on school and disability issues.
- Albert works for a public relations company. He is a single dad who shares his gift for letter writing by volunteering time in the evening to help other families write letters to improve services for their children.
- Robert and Isabel are highly involved parents who volunteer their time to help out with 4-H and other activities for kids in their community.
- Elizabeth is a highly involved parent in the Carlsbad area. She has attended many Parents Reaching Out workshops and volunteers to help coordinate Next Steps to Success training in her community.
- Lana has been a long time advocate in the Deming area. She attends parent support meetings and PRO workshops in her community and shares what she learns with other families.
- Phyllis is an amazing mom. She is involved in the regional conferences in the Farmington area and is taking classes to finish her degree. She serves on several boards and advisory committees in addition to the time she gives as a PRO volunteer.
- Jamie translates information for families on education, Medicaid, or SSI and also refers families to Parents Reaching Out.
- Brian was a D level SPED student all of his life. He has learned how to advocate for himself and wants to share his skills with others. He is on track toward certification as a teacher.



# How Do Schools and Communities Involve Families?

Successful models of family involvement honor families by validating any level of involvement or contribution they make. They acknowledge that families are an asset to the group. It is worthwhile for systems (schools, early intervention, healthcare and others) to build partnerships that promote and support *three basic qualities* as they connect with families:

*Usefulness:* Families have learned a myriad of ways they can assist others to find paths leading to success and independence for their children. *Invite them to share!*

*Sense of belonging:* Everyone wants to feel like we belong. Families are no different. When families feel like they are included and respected by others, they work toward the greater goal of helping others. *Welcome them!*

*Competence:* Families learn a lot about their children's needs in school and society as they navigate complex systems and they are willing to learn more. *Offer learning opportunities.*

Many school districts in New Mexico have adopted The Epstein Model of Family Involvement. Epstein's six levels of family involvement emphasize that parenting and home support for learning are just as important as other activities that may be more visible to the community. In fact, those activities may be most valuable for our children.

- **Parenting:** Supporting families in their role as parents recognizes their importance as the “expert” on their child. Providing child-rearing skills that promote home-environments to support learning builds strong foundations. Inviting parents to share their perspective helps staff understand and appreciate families and reinforces a parent's sense of belonging.
- **Communicating:** Using a variety of communication tools to share school events, policy and student progress strengthens school and home partnerships. Information shared in “family friendly” terms and in the language used in the home builds their knowledge and let's them know that they belong. Minimizing the use of jargon improves understanding.
- **Volunteering:** Creating ways that families can be involved in the school or school programs and recruitment geared to their interests reinforces their sense of belonging. Flexible schedules that engage families as volunteers and audiences shows value for their time.
- **Learning at home:** Linking families with their children's curriculum through learning activities that can be done at home, as well as homework acknowledges their competence. It helps parents make informed decisions about their child's education.
- **Decision making:** Including families as decision makers, advocates, members of school councils, and committees values their contributions as stakeholders in the process.
- **Collaborating with the community:** Coordinating access to services in the community with family needs makes schools the “hub” of the community network.

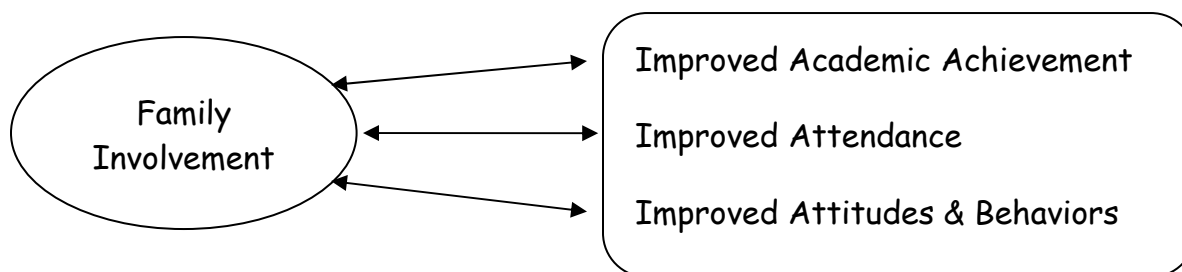


Check out the Tools and Resources section for great ideas for each of these areas.

Research by the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education (NCPIE) shows that quality family involvement programs serve as a forum for discussion and a channel for change. NCPIE recommends that schools and communities keep in mind the following points:

- **Remember, there is no "one size fits all" answer to partnerships.** Identify, with families, the strengths, interests and needs of families, students, and school staff and work from there.
- *Set clear and measurable goals* based on family and community input.
- *Develop a variety of outreach tools* to inform families, businesses, and the community about family involvement policies and programs.
- *Provide a varied menu of opportunities for participation* geared to the diverse needs of families, including working families. Recognize that effective family involvement takes many forms that may not necessarily require parents' presence at meetings or events.
- *Ensure that families and students have complete information about the standards students are expected to meet.* Share work samples that meets standards and explain how students will be assessed.
- *Ensure that families and students have access to information* about nutrition and health care, after-school programs, and community service agencies.
- **Recognize how a community's historic, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural resources can generate interest in family-community participation.**
- *Hire and train a family coordinator* as a liaison between families and schools that will coordinate family activities. A qualification for this job posting should be "parent living in the community".
- *Use creative forms of communication between educators and families* that are personal and goal-oriented. Make optimal use of new communication technologies. One idea might be telephones with voice-mail features in every classroom.
- *Find positive messages to send to all families* about their child at least once a month.
- In addition to parent-teacher conferences, *offer regular opportunities for families to discuss their children's progress*, raise concerns, and work as partners with school staff.
- *Make sure that family members acting as volunteers in the school have opportunities to help teachers* in meaningful ways like assisting with instructional tasks. Families might speak to students about careers, explain cultural traditions, or share a special skill.
- *Provide professional development opportunities for educators and families* that help them to work together effectively as partners in the educational process.
- *Involve families in evaluating the effectiveness of family involvement programs* and activities on a regular basis and use this information to improve them.

# Measuring the Outcomes of Family Involvement



There is a *significant* statistical relationship between the level of family involvement and improved outcomes for children and young adults. Acknowledging families as *assets* in our schools (and other systems) contributes to our children's and young adults' success as learners, future leaders and productive citizens in our communities.

## What Counts Gets Counted!

At Parents Reaching Out, we firmly believe that there is more family involvement in our schools today than anyone may realize. We often hear statements like “we need family involvement”. It might be more productive to ask: What do you mean by family involvement?” Defining parent involvement has a lot to do with individual perspective.



As New Mexico schools and communities move forward to make family involvement more than just a slogan, we must recognize that family involvement includes a wide spectrum of activities that fit the diversity of our families. We must call upon our schools to count families involvement opportunities to establish a baseline to measure improvement as a part of the state's accountability process. What could be included in these "counts"? There are endless possibilities.

Look beyond Open House and Parent-Teacher conference days to count family involvement. Include parent participation in school advisory councils, parent booster clubs, FFA, Honor Society, and IEP/parent teacher meetings. Measure contacts with families through phone/e-mail logs, sign-in sheets for family nights and workshops, and outreach activity records. As school staffs are held accountable for measuring family involvement, schools will become more inviting to all.

"The way schools care about children is reflected in the way schools care about the children's families. If educators view children simply as students, they are likely to see the family as separate from the school. That is, the family is expected to do its job and leave the education of children to the schools. If educators view students as children, they are likely to see both the family and the community as partners with the school in children's education and development. Partners recognize their shared interest in and responsibilities for children, and they work together to create better programs and opportunities for students." Dr. Joyce Epstein, "Caring for the Children We Share"

# Moving Toward Parent Leadership and Beyond

Meaningful parent leadership takes place when parents gain the knowledge and skills to function in meaningful roles. They can be a “parent voice” that helps shape the services for their family including programs in their local communities.

Parents become leaders as they work with other parents and professionals to build effective partnerships. They actively participate in decision-making that affects families and communities. The parents involved in these collaborations are called Parent Leaders.

## Who is a Parent Leader?

- A parent, grandparent, kinship care provider, foster parent, or anyone else in a parenting role.
- Someone with personal experience in using resources or services to strengthen his or her family.
- Someone who is speaking and acting from his or her perspective as a parent.
- A person not speaking or acting in a staff role for any organization or institution.



## What do parents need to be effective leaders?

- A strong definition of their role as a “parent leader”.
- Access to training.
- Clear opportunities to contribute to program development, implementation, oversight and evaluation, policymaking, training and technical assistance, public awareness and outreach.
- Tangible supports such as assistance with child care and transportation and compensation for wages lost from work while contributing in a Parent Leader role.
- Opportunities to work in partnership with staff and professionals in organizations connected with key issues related to the parent leader’s area of interest and commitment.

*In the words of a parent:* “Some of the ways I get families involved is to get parents directly involved with their kids in a Summer Bridge Program. These were children that were not going to go on to 9th grade and would have had to repeat the 8th grade otherwise. The children had to go through a ropes course, complete the program successfully AND their parents or guardians were expected to be involved in the process.

It worked out great. I also was able to help several families in the IEP process. Once you help a parent with this--their lives are changed. It is a great feeling to educate a parent and then hear about the changes that occurred in their school.”

- Parent from Albuquerque South Valley

# Parent Leaders as Advocates

Advocate: One who argues for a cause or person; a supporter Webster's Dictionary

There are many ways that parents become advocates for their children. Parent Leaders are often strong advocates for themselves, their own family and other families in their community. The activities below are examples of different types of advocacy that we see in parent leaders.

**1. Getting together with other parents to start a new program in your community.**

*This is an example of “self” advocacy. It is something parents do all the time when they speak up for themselves or their family.*



**2. Helping a neighbor who gets a confusing letter from school about his or her child's behavior in class.**

*This example shows “case” advocacy, which often involves helping someone else resolve a concern with a complicated bureaucracy.*

**3. Making a presentation at their church about how they became a Parent Leader, or what they need to do to strengthen and support families.**

*This is an example of a form of advocacy called “public or community education”.*

**4. Providing a parent voice when there are possible rule changes in their local school district.**

*This example shows “administrative or regulatory” advocacy which includes responding in writing when a governmental entity asks for public feedback a change to rules is proposed.*

**5. Testifying as part of a panel before a state legislative committee on the importance of state funding for family strengthening programs.**

*This example relates to “legislative” advocacy, which includes steps such as testifying, making phone calls or writing a letter to educate and influence a legislator's position.*

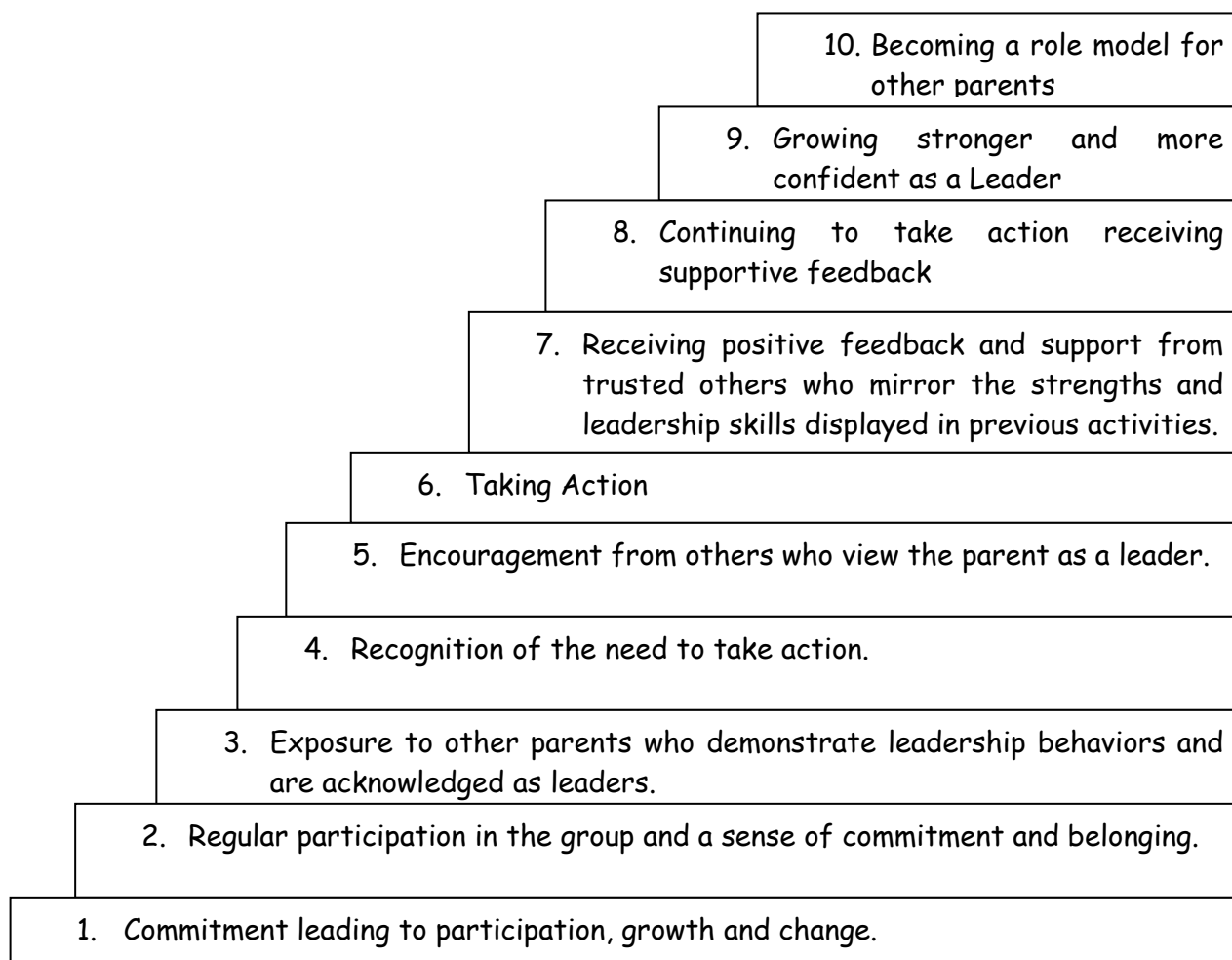
Rachel is a parent who was supported with information from Parents Reaching Out. She attended the Recordkeeping workshop and the Overview of Special Education Process sponsored by the Early Intervention Program. She shares information about PRO with parents in Pine Hill and gives them information upcoming workshops. She serves on the planning committee for the Gallup conference and the self advocacy group set up through NAPAP. Rachel is promotes advocacy as she provides support to other families.

# Pathways to Parent Leadership

## Ten Steps to Success

The model below describes the steps many Parent Leaders experience as they move along their personal pathways in developing leadership skills and assuming leadership roles. This process is usually not linear, and Parent Leaders may move up and down the continuum based on their personal life situations, commitments and activities. Parent Leadership is fostered by supporting parents wherever they are along this path. The key elements of this model include:

1. Connections with other Parent Leaders who are in leadership roles;
2. Opportunities to take on leadership roles, however small at first, and to practice them in a safe setting;
3. A relationship with another person the Parent Leader respects and trusts and who provides them with important feedback and support; and
4. A sense of belonging to the group or organization where their leadership skills are put into practice.





There is no guidebook for families to learn how to be leaders. Parents have shared their stories that tell us that they learn leadership skills in a variety of ways.

**Parents learn family leadership through their children by:**

- Taking charge in unfamiliar situations, rather than assuming that service systems will do everything;
- Struggling for the best education for their children, negotiating both planning and mediation processes;
- Problem-solving a complex maze of systems to gather the needed supports and services that don't often come easily; and/or
- Asserting their right to be decision makers for their children and families.

**Parents learn leadership skills from others.**

Parent leaders look to each other for validation, support, information, skills and recognition. Parents learn leadership from their children, other parents, mentors, workshop leaders and trainers, professionals and national leaders and visionaries.



**Parents learn leadership skills in a variety of places.**

Parents build leadership skills as they participate in parent-to-parent network meetings, informal conversations, workshops and training programs, planning sessions, advisory meetings, and at home every day.

**Parents learn leadership skills by getting involved on a systems level.**

Parents build leadership skills by accepting leadership roles and being an active participant and contributor in systems level change.

**Parents learn leadership skills by volunteering their time.**

There are countless opportunities to serve on committees, advisory boards, as advocates for other families, and participating in training programs. Many of these opportunities offer no direct financial compensation.

**Opportunity Knocks!**

*In the words of a school administrator:* "Connecting with families should be looked at as an opportunity to re-evaluate and improve what we are doing. They are part of the solution for improving our school. We need to think of our parents as partners!"

*Parent Leadership in action:* "Gail is involved at the local, state and national levels. She provides assistance to families and connects them to each other and other agencies. She is well known and respected in her community and mentors other families. Gail and her husband contact political leaders by phone, letter and e-mail."

# How Do We Face the Partnership Challenge?

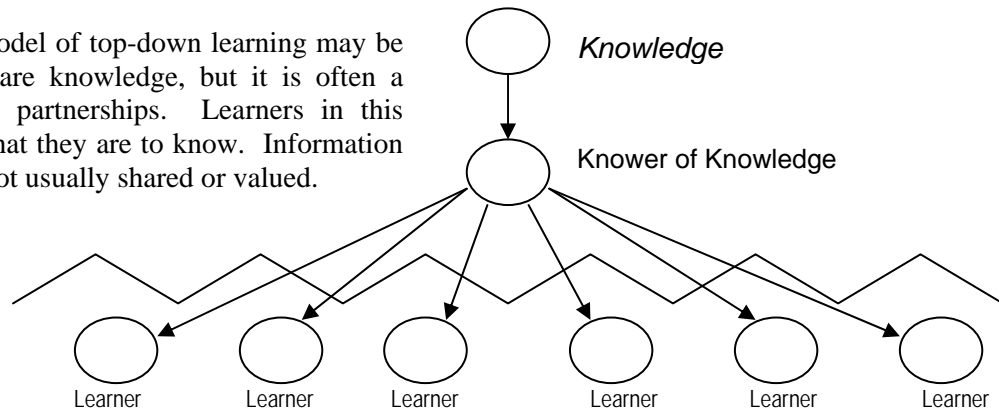
Every partnership brings challenges as people with different experiences and perspectives begin to work toward a common goal. Forming a lasting relationship that will improve outcomes for our children is no easy task. It will require patience, respect and information sharing. It is a learning process for everyone. As partners come together, we must recognize that there is an imbalance in knowledge from the very beginning, but everyone has something to offer!

Those who work in systems (early intervention, education, health care and others) are trained in the work they do. They go to school, attend workshops and participate in continuing education to learn about their role in the system. Families did not receive a training manual with the birth of their child, but they do have practical knowledge learned from their experiences with their child. Parents do know and care about their child.

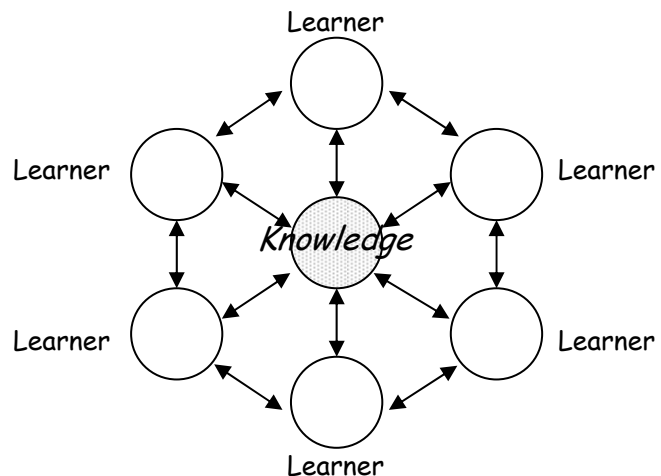
As partners, parents must be provided opportunities to learn about the system and have the tools to use this knowledge to make informed decisions on behalf of their children. Learning opportunities also need to be offered to educators, health care providers, policy makers and others that will help them understand the family perspective and generate new ideas to improve our children's future.

*How should these learning opportunities take place?*

The traditional model of top-down learning may be a fast way to share knowledge, but it is often a barrier to a true partnerships. Learners in this model are told what they are to know. Information from learners is not usually shared or valued.



Effective partnerships can be built when groups use a *collaborative learning model*. Each partner plays a useful and competent role in the process. There is no single "expert". Information is shared by the learners. They ask questions. They share ideas, gain new knowledge, and brainstorm solutions focused on a common goal. Even though someone may lead or facilitate group discussions. Each person makes a valued contribution as a partner and shares ownership in the outcomes.



# Parents Reaching Out

## A Resource and Partner for Family Involvement

The key to successful family involvement programs is tapping every resource. Parents Reaching Out is a statewide organization reaching out to families who have children with a variety of needs (special health care needs, learning issues, disabilities and those disenfranchised by systems). We are the only statewide organization that crosses geographic, ethnic, and special needs to provide education, advocacy, information, and support to New Mexico families. We can be an effective partner as stakeholders create and expand opportunities to engage families.



*Every family must have tools to help them navigate the systems that will, in some way, shape their children's future. As stakeholders focus on family involvement, we can apply concepts from family centered approach used by the early childhood system that encourages families to:*

- Be an effective parent advocate and remember they know their child the best.
- Know their family's rights and responsibilities.
- Let team members know about the strengths and needs of their child and their family.
- Ask questions and speak out if they have suggestions or disagree.
- Keep copies of reports, records or medical information received, as well as any letters or notes made during conversations.
- Find information by attending trainings, conferences, using the internet and the library.

Community partnerships can build networks to inform, engage and support families while building their capacity to be involved and stay involved. Parents Reaching Out offers research based “family friendly” materials and workshops. We recognize that each community is at a different place in their journey to promote meaningful family involvement. We can be an effective part of building partnerships in your community. We offer support and information designed to meet your needs.

Learning opportunities for focus groups such as: school improvement teams, leadership teams, advisory councils, administrators, school boards and community agencies;

School in-service workshops or seminars on various topics, including: early childhood, No Child Left Behind, literacy, Positive Behavior Supports, transition, the IEP Process, healthcare system, communication, record keeping and much more;

Partnership seminars that include families, school personnel and other stakeholders; and

Resource materials to support activities developed by school and community groups. Our publications and fact sheets are family friendly. Our easy to read fact and tip sheets cover a wide range of topics and make great additions to school or agency newsletters.

*Together, we can make a difference! Give us a call. We're here to help!*

Parents Reaching Out works in communities to promote smooth transitions for families as they move between and among systems. We build bridges to improve access for families and help remove the barriers that have been created to limit family involvement. *Although the suggestions below focus on schools, the concepts can be applied to other areas such as the medical, judicial or early childhood systems.*



- Be sure the first contact with parents is a positive one.
- Communicate with parents straightforwardly and simply, avoiding educational "jargon."
- Ensure that all parents have regular access to clear, concise, and easily readable information about their children's school and classroom.
- Ask parents to share their concerns and opinions about school and address those concerns.
- Accommodate parents' work schedules.
- Accommodate language and cultural differences.

Source: Strong Families, Strong Schools

Our work has a stronger message when we link our information with other national, state and local groups. The National PTA has set National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs.

- Establish regular, meaningful communication between home and school.
- Promote and support parenting skills.
- Encourage active parent participation in student learning.
- Welcome parents as volunteer partners in schools.
- Encourage schools and systems to develop policies that invite families to act as full partners in making school decisions that affect children and families.
- Reach out to the community for resources to strengthen schools.



The National PTA website ([www.pta.org](http://www.pta.org)) provides some great information about ways of letting parents know they are welcome in school. It helps families find ways to contribute to their children's education both in and out of school. Regular home-school communication (newsletters, tips for student success and school event calendars) are tools to keep families included in the school activities. PTA encourages schools to find ways to involve parents in everyday school life that includes goods, services and ideas that build on the strengths of families while respecting their needs.

Education World (2003) reports that research shows "that parental involvement is more important to student success at every grade level than family income or education." These studies also showed "that many parents say that they feel unwelcome or uncomfortable in their children's schools."

# Family Involvement Opportunities through Parents Reaching Out

As we work with families in communities across our state, there are many ways we can spread the word about the importance of family involvement. If we want systems to value and include families as resources and partners in decision making, the first step needs to begin with us! We have opportunities at our doorstep. We provide a safe nurturing place for families that helps build their confidence to work for changes in their own communities. To learn more about these opportunities, contact Parents Reaching Out or visit our website: [www.parentsreachingout.org](http://www.parentsreachingout.org)

*Here are just a few of the ways that PRO supports and encourages family involvement:*

- 1. Parents Reaching Out connects one family with another through a variety of groups designed to meet their interests and needs.** The umbrella for these groups and activities is the Family Leadership Action Network (FLAN)

- DreamWeavers—Early Intervention
- Parents as Leaders (PALS)—Parenting & Quality Schools
- Health Information Parent Specialists (HIPS)
- Family Faculty (FAF)—Systems Change
- Adobe Corp—Special Education



- 2. Inviting families to participate in workshops that offer advocacy tools they can use.**

- Early Intervention
- Children at Risk
- Quality Schools
- Special Education
- Navigating the Health Care System
- Systems Change

- 3. Encouraging parent leadership skills when the time is right in a way that fits their style.**

- Inviting parents to help with workshops (greeting participants at the registration table, assisting with presentations, etc.);
- Tapping their interest as volunteers (Support Parents, Resource Center, clerical, etc.);
- Providing support and information to parents selected to serve on committees, boards and advisory groups within our organization as well as at the local, state and national levels;
- Mentoring families interested in writing letters to policymakers, participating in conferences or parent panels, helping other families write letters or set up a record-keeping system.
- Presenting the parent perspective in university classes.

# Promoting Parent Leadership in Our Communities

Parents Reaching Out provides information, support and encouragement to promote family leadership as a means to bring positive change for our kids. As we work with families, we can provide learning opportunities that will help them ask questions and seek ways to be part of decisions that affect their child. We can give them “voice lessons” to advocate for change rather than just accept what systems offer as a one size fits all solution.

At the same time, Parents Reaching Out must open the doors for systems by educating those who work in those systems about the gifts that families can bring to the table. Our collaborations with systems help them see that families are capable and competent partners who hold the keys to improve outcomes. Parent Leaders are assets in their community. Explore the possibilities!

- Role Model for Other Parents
- Co-Trainer
- Event Organizer
- Participant in Focus Groups
- Witness at Public Hearing
- Contributor to Written and Audiovisual Materials
- Participant at Conferences and Working Meetings
- Curriculum, Textbook or Grant Reviewer
- Participant in Quality Improvement / Evaluation Activities
- Participant in Needs / Strengths Assessment Processes
- Advocate for Individuals, Families and / or Programs
- Translator of materials or interpreter for families
- Task Force or Steering Committee Member
- Advisory Board Member
- Member of Hiring Committees
- Member of Board of Directors
- Planning Commission Member

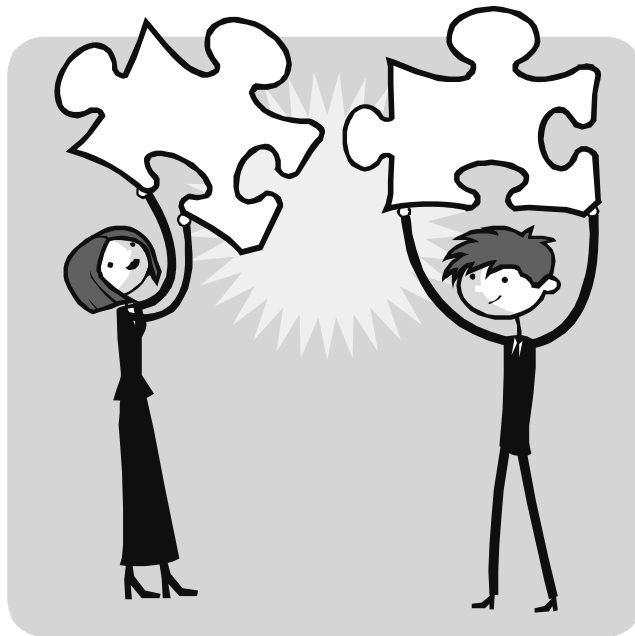
## Getting to Know Our Neighbors

Planned social events or community-wide activities are a great way to meet your neighbors and discover the untapped resources of family members within your community. As you visit, use your listening skills to identify the needs, interests and potential of each person you meet!

Schools in a community in Southwest New Mexico combine these socials with Math and Science or Literacy Nights. Parents and teachers work together to make these events a great success!



# *Tools and Resources*



When we take the time to build supportive partnerships in communities, families have access to resources and information to become involved in the bigger picture. Family Involvement is a worthwhile investment to bring positive change in the systems that affect our lives.

## Unity

*I dreamed I stood in a studio and watched two sculptors there.*

The clay they used was a young child's mind, and they fashioned it with care.

One was a teacher. The tools he used were books and music and art.

One was a parent with a guiding hand, and a gentle, loving heart.

Day after day the teacher toiled,  
with touch that was deft and sure.

While the parent labored by his side  
and polished and smoothed it over.

And when at last their task was done,  
they stood proud of what they had wrought.

For things they had molded into the child  
could neither be sold or bought.

And each agreed he would have failed  
if he had worked alone.

For behind the parent stood the school,  
and behind the teacher, the home.



Author Unknown



# Is Your School Open to Partnerships with Parents?

*Use this tool to see where your school falls on the path from Fortress to Partnership. Under each question, circle the letter beside the statement that best describes your school.*

(Adapted from the Case of Parent Leadership ~ Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence.)

## **1. What is your school's attitude toward families?**

- a. Parents belong at home, not at school. If students don't do well, it's because their families don't give them enough support.
- b. Parents are welcome when asked. There's only so much they can do.
- c. Parents can be involved at school in a number of ways. It tries to make contact with all parents at least once a year.
- d. Our school sets high standards for all students and families. It partners with families to make sure every single student succeeds.

## **2. Does the school give families information about standards and the curriculum?**

- a. Parents don't need to know much about this, and they probably won't understand it anyway.
- b. Parents get information about what students will be learning at the fall open house.
- c. Teachers send home folders of student work.
- d. Families help assess student portfolios, using scoring guides. They also attend regular exhibits of student work, where students explain how it meets standards.

## **3. Can parents and family members easily meet with the principal and visit classrooms?**

- a. Families should not bother the school staff. Visiting the classroom would distract the children. Besides, parents will need security clearances before they are allowed in.
- b. Our school calls families if their children are having problems. Families can visit on report card pickup day.
- c. Our school has several family events every year. Parents talk to classes about their jobs and hobbies and help out as tutors.
- d. Parents are involved in all aspects of the school. They can attend staff training, and the principal has regular hours each week to meet with families. Every school committee has active parent members.

## **4. Does the school have an active parent group, such as a PTA or Parent Association?**

- a. The principal has picked a small group of parents to help out.
- b. The active parents are mostly middle class. The others don't come or contribute.
- c. The parent group sets its own agenda, raises money for their school and is actively involved in writing the school handbook.
- d. Families decide how they want to be involved. They reach out to make sure all families take part in some way. Parents can use the phone, copier, fax and computers. They are also encouraged to participate in the decision making process that will affect student success.

- 5. Does the school openly discuss tough issues, like achievement gaps, racism and bullying?**
- The problems at school are dealt with by the professional staff.
  - Our principal sets the agenda for discussions at staff meetings. Sometimes a few parents are invited to meetings.
  - Our school gives progress reports to parents, but the test data are hard to understand.
  - Parents and teachers have study groups and do action research on issues like prejudice and tracking. Families are part of all major decisions.

**Get your school's score:**

Count the number of times you checked each letter. Multiply the times you used each letter by the corresponding values below and then add up your points.

a = one point   b = two points   c = three points   d = four points

Question 1:	Letter circled_____	X	point value for letter_____	= score for question_____
Question 2	Letter circled_____	X	point value for letter_____	= score for question_____
Question 3	Letter circled_____	X	point value for letter_____	= score for question_____
Question 4	Letter circled_____	X	point value for letter_____	= score for question_____
Question 5	Letter circled_____	X	point value for letter_____	= score for question_____
				Total Score _____

<b>Where does your school fall?</b>	
5-7 points:	<b>Fortress School.</b> Your school is trying to keep parents away rather than work with them. In standards-based terms, it is <i>below basic</i> .
8-11 points:	<b>Come if We Call School.</b> Your school wants parents to be involved, but only on its terms. In standards-based terms, your school is at the <i>basic</i> level.
12-15 points:	<b>Open-door School.</b> Your school welcomes families and supports them to be involved in a number of ways. In standards-based terms, it is <i>proficient</i> .
16-20 points:	<b>Partnership School.</b> Your school is willing and able to work with all families. We bet the student achievement level goes up every year. It is <i>advanced</i> .

*Do you have questions or ideas for improvement? Write them down and share them with your school principal and parent group.*

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# How Welcome Are Parents in Our School?

The National Parent Teacher Association (1990) developed a parent survey to determine if families feel welcome in a school. *This survey can be adapted by school action teams for a needs assessment as they work toward building family involvement.*

**Directions:** Think about the experiences you have had when you have visited your child's school. Your PTA and the school staff want to make parents feel comfortable and a part of the school. Please take a few minutes to fill out the following brief survey. Be honest. All answers will be anonymous--please don't write your name on the sheet. Your PTA leader will collect the surveys.

After the PTA has analyzed the results, a committee composed of PTA leaders and other parents, the principal, and teacher representatives will decide how best to use the information and make recommendations for helping parents feel more welcome in our school.

1. Am I always greeted in a friendly, courteous way when I contact the school either on the phone or in person?
2. Does the school have a reception area for visitors equipped with information about the school and directions so that I can find my way around the building?
3. Did the school conduct some kind of orientation program for my family when I first enrolled my child?
4. Do school staff and parents have informal occasions when we can get to know each other during the school year?
5. Does the principal have regular office hours when parents and students can stop in? If 'yes' to the above question, are those hours convenient for me?
6. Is there a school suggestion box where teachers', students', and parents' ideas are encouraged, and are ideas implemented when possible?
7. Does the school encourage me to visit my child's classroom outside of planned occasions (after checking first with the teacher involved)?
8. Am I and other parents welcome to use the building after school hours for community purposes?
9. Does the principal ask for parents' suggestions when making decisions that will affect the running of the school?
10. Are limited-English-speaking parents given opportunities to understand the curriculum and participate in the school's activities?
11. Does the school provide written information to parents about school rules, parent-teacher conferences, and other important items?

Yes	No	Not Sure

*Thank you for completing this survey. Feel free to write comments or suggestions on the back of this form.*

# The Right Question— A Powerful Tool for Informed Decision Making

Families need good information to make informed decisions that will help their child succeed. The best way to get information is to ask questions and listen to the answers. Asking “the right question” will help get specific information and may help to open discussions about possibilities. It is helpful to know when to use close-ended or open ended questions.

**Closed-Ended Questions** are answered with a simple "yes" or "no" or with a one word answer.

**Open-Ended Questions** require more explanation. They cannot be answered with a simple "yes" or "no" or a one-word answer. These questions usually begin with words like *who*, *what*, *where*, *why* or *how*.



Formulating questions is a skill. The Right Question Project (RQP) provides a technique to help parents learn to formulate their own questions so they can be an active partner in decision-making. People who learn how to formulate their own questions are no longer dependent upon someone else to decide what they need to know. They are better prepared to think and act for themselves. They are able to hold themselves and the systems they deal with more accountable.

**RQP is a question formulation technique.** Asking the right question can quickly lead to new ideas. Thinking about questions before asking them may be a short cut to better results. The process serves as a simple powerful tool to:

- Develop action plans
- Explore complex issues
- Help people participate
- Help people discover their own power to help themselves.

To use this tool, let us begin with the definition of decision. *A decision is a choice of one option from two or more choices.* Decisions are made throughout the entire day. There are also times that other people make decisions which affect someone else’s life. It is important to consider how others are affected by the decisions we make.



The step by step process for the Right Question is described on the following page. You may want to practice using the RQP process on a decision you have to make every day. Thinking in questions could help you find answers to questions like: What do I cook for dinner? What route should I take to work when a traffic jam is reported on the route I normally use?

Just being able to ask good questions builds self-confidence. Being able to ask good questions is a great way to get parents involved and develop leadership skills.

## Think about an issue that is important to you and your family.

Use the RQP technique for formulating questions that will be right for your situation. The steps in this process were developed by The Right Question Project, Inc. We encourage you to work with a friend or family member as you practice using this tool.

1. **Brainstorm Questions about Your Topic**—Come up with a list of as many questions as you can think of about your topic or issue.
2. **Prioritize**—Choose three questions you want to explore further.
  - a. Which questions are open-ended? Which questions are close-ended?
  - b. What are the advantages and disadvantages of close-ended questions?
  - c. What are the advantages and disadvantages of open-ended questions?
  - d. Look over your list of questions.
    - Would you like to change any of them to make them close-ended or open-ended?
    - Which questions can you use right now?
    - Which ones will be helpful later? (You can make a file for "great questions to ask later"!)
3. **Branch Off**—Now choose just *one* of your three questions. Brainstorm more questions about it.
4. **Prioritize Again**—Look over the questions you have and choose three you now want to address now. Use these questions as you plan to take action to address your issue.



*Setting your priorities by "thinking in questions" prepares you for decision-making.*

### What happens when others make decisions that affect me or my family?

You can use RQP to help you "think in questions" that will lead you to informed decisions and better understand decisions that are made.

- The decisions should be based on legitimate reasons. Using RQP can help you ask questions about the rules, the regulations, the policy in place and criteria used for the decision.
- The systems that affect your family (schools, government, health or medical) should have a clearly defined process for decision making. Ask: Who is the person(s) that will make the decision? When and where will the decision be made?



The most important questions you can ask are the ones about your role in the decision making process. Ask: How do I know the decision involves my participation? What is my role in the decision making? How does it provide for me the opportunity to express my opinion? How will I express my opinion if I disagree with the decision?

# Plan Activities to Promote Partnerships

Small group activities often provide a “safe setting” to empower each stakeholder to contribute ideas, share concerns and develop possible solutions. This activity has been used successfully with school and community groups. Aim for mixed groups of stakeholders to make the most out of this opportunity to share perspectives.

Each group should select a reporter and recorder. Provide each group with markers and large sheets of paper. Set time limits for each phase so that there is enough time for small group work and reporting back to the group as a whole. This keeps the focus.

*Introduce the activities by asking the whole group to think about these questions:*

- Which partnership practices are currently working well at each grade level?
- Which partnership practices should be improved or added in each grade?
- How do you want your school's family involvement practices to look three years from now?
- Which present practices should change and which should continue?

Begin this activity by asking stakeholders (parents, school staff, community leaders and policy makers) to picture success. (Educators/Service Providers) Think of something that involved parents that you think was successful. What made it a success? (Family members) Think of an activity at your child’s school, describe how you were involved and tell why you think it was successful. Share in small group. *If this activity is used with a group of stakeholders who are coming together for the first time, the facilitator may want the groups to define the types of involvement as a starting point for discussion.*

Use the Right Question technique to brainstorm questions that could be used to develop proposals for your school’s Family Involvement program. Encourage groups to “think outside of the box” consider all resources in the community. Each small group is assigned one of the types of family involvement for this activity. After the allotted time, the facilitator calls on each small group to report to the group as a whole. This allows all topics to be explored.

Type 1: Parenting

Type 2: Communicating

Type 3: Volunteering

Type 4: Learning at Home

Type 5: Decision Making

Type 6: Collaborating with Community

Communication is never a destination.

It is a journey that must be worked on by experts and novices alike.

# 68 Parent Involvement Ideas That Really Work!

The Parent Institute has compiled a list of ideas that have been used to encourage and support family involvement. As you review the ideas, you'll discover that many of these activities are already in place. You'll discover new ideas for building partnerships in your school or agency.

1. Know THE SECRET to getting parents to attend meetings at school—make sure they know they're genuinely invited.
2. Establish a friendly contact with parents early in the year, "In Time of Peace."
3. Insist that teachers not wait until it's too late to tell parents about potentially serious problems. Early contact helps.
4. Ask teachers to make at least two positive phone calls to parents each week. Add a phone line. Parent communication is a cost-effective investment.
5. Remember the 3 "F"s for success—Food, Families, Fun.
6. Focus on the strengths of families—they know their children better than anyone else. Find ways to get that information to teachers, other school staff.
7. Learn how to deal with angry parents—separate the parent from the argument he is making. Use active listening. Don't get angry. Look for areas of agreement, "We both want your child to do well." Find a win-win solution. If you're not sure about a parent suggestion say, "I'll certainly keep that in mind." If necessary, devise a temporary solution.
8. Provide a brief parent newsletter. One sheet of paper is best.
9. Remember "30-3-30" in writing school newsletters. Eighty percent of people will spend just 30 seconds reading it. Nineteen percent will spend three minutes. One percent will spend 30 minutes.
10. Remember the dollar bill rule for newsletters. A dollar bill placed anywhere, at any angle, on any page should touch some element of graphic interest—headline, box, screen, bullets, bold type, picture—or it's too dull for most people to read.
11. Develop written policies encouraging parent involvement. If it's not in policy, the message is we don't care much about it.
12. Write for parents at the 4<sup>th</sup>- 6<sup>th</sup> grade level. Use a computer to check the reading level.
13. Know why parents say they are not involved: 1) Don't have time, 2) Don't know what to do, 3) Don't know it is important, 4) Don't speak English.
14. Take heart from the "one-third rule." Research says if you can get one-third of a school's parents involved, you can begin to make significant improvement in student achievement.
15. Be aware that teachers are more reluctant to contact parents than vice versa. Solution: get parents and teachers together—just as people—in comfortable social situations.
16. Stress two-way communication between schools and parents. "One-way" isn't communication.
17. Conduct school surveys to reveal family attitudes about your school.



18. Use “key communicators” to control the rumor mill. Keep those to whom others turn for school information well informed, especially the three “B”s—barbers, bartenders, and beauty shop operators.
19. Use simple evaluation forms to get parent feedback on every meeting or event. If we ask, they will tell us what they want.
20. Try “quick notes” home—notes the day something happens. A parent helps the child with a spelling test and the child does better. Shoot an immediate note home to say, “It’s working!”
21. Take parents’ pictures. Tell them in advance that pictures will be taken with their child, and prepare for a crowd.
22. Encourage teachers to assign homework that requires talking with someone at home.
23. Ask teachers what they would like to tell parents if they had the chance—and ask parents what they would like to tell teachers. Then exchange the information! Great program.
24. Put up a “Welcome” sign in every language spoken by students and parents at your school—get parents to help get the words right.
25. Have handy a ready reference list of helpful materials parents might use to help them cope with student problems. Better yet have a lending library.
26. Set up a parent center in your school stocked with resources to help (and lend to) parents.
27. Offer parenting classes—with videos and lots of handouts.
28. Know the facts about the changing structure of the family—and consider

how schools can cope to best help children.

29. Consider an in-service program for staff on facts about single-parent families—it can be a real eye-opener.
30. Breakfast sessions at school draw busy parents like crazy.
31. Be very careful to monitor how your school telephone is answered. Phone impressions are lasting ones!
32. Provide “Go to the Office” slips for teachers to give students who do something good. Student takes slip to principal who compliments child, writes note to parents on the slip (or calls parents), sends it home.
33. Be aware that parents are looking for a school where their children are likely to succeed—more than a school with high test scores. Show parents you care.
34. Send a school bus filled with staff around the school neighborhood to meet and welcome students and parents just before school starts.
35. Solicit parent volunteers at the Kindergarten Registration Day program. Make it easy to sign up when parents are most enthusiastic.
36. Don’t make judgments about parents’ lack of interest in their children’s education. You’ll probably be wrong. “Walk a mile in their shoes” and understand that what looks like apathy may be exhaustion.
37. Try day-long parent academies with short repeated workshops on topics such as building self-esteem, language development, motivating children, encouraging reading, discipline, talking with kids about sex, dealing with divorce, etc. Test weekdays vs. weekends.



38. Provide training and lots of school information for parent volunteers. They are powerful goodwill ambassadors.
39. Invite parents to fill out interview forms detailing child's special qualities—interests, abilities, accomplishments. Teachers can use information to write story about child to read at school program, post on bulletin board.
40. Investigate “voice mail” systems to keep parents up-to-date on homework, school activities.
41. Find ways to provide positive reinforcement to parents. Everyone responds well to recognition.
42. Involve parents in goal-setting for their children. It promotes working as a team.
43. Use research findings that one of the best ways to get parents involved is to simply ask them, and also tell them what you'd like them to do.
44. Give parents specific suggestions about how they can help their children. Many just need to know things like: “Read aloud every day.” “Turn the TV off during homework time.”
45. Try a short student-written newsletter for parents about what students have been learning. (You still need your own parent newsletter. You cannot fulfill your obligation to communicate by delegating the job to students.)
46. Help parents understand why excessive TV hurts children—TV robs them of needed play, exercise, reading practice, study time, dulls critical thinking, etc.
47. Understand the diversity of single parent families. Living with one parent can be wonderful for some children, destructive for others
48. Offer school sponsored sessions on single parenting.

49. Help parents understand that student effort is the most important key to school success, not just skill level or ability.
50. Encouraging (and assisting) parents to network among themselves to solve common problems builds parent support.
51. Provide some parent education classes at the workplace. Convenience works for 7-11 stores and it also works for schools.
52. Try providing “Good News Postcards” for teachers to write short positive note about students and mail them home. One thousand postcards cost less than \$200 to mail.
53. Ask parents' help in developing questions for a school “audit” to see if your school is family friendly.
54. Invite parents to a program about helping children do well on homework and eliminating things that distract them. Most have never had such information.
55. Ask parents to fill out a “Contact Sheet” listing home and work addresses and phone numbers—and the best times to be contacted in either place.
56. Have children write personal notes to their parents on school papers, surveys, invitations to school programs, etc. Watch parent response rates soar!
57. Help all school staff understand the central role they play in building parent attitudes, support and involvement—secretary, custodian, food service staff, bus driver, librarian, aides, everyone.



58. Try sending home “Resource Bags” filled with games, videos, reading materials and instructions on specific activities parents can do with children at home. They’re very popular.
59. Having problems getting parents involved with a child who’s having discipline or other problems? Try videotaping class sessions. Showing the “candid camera” tape to parents and children works wonders.
60. Make sure all staff know the top things parents report they want to know about school: 1) How they can be involved with their child’s education, 2) How they can spend more time at school, 3) How to talk to teachers, other school staff, 4) How to help their child at home.

61. Try holding “non-academic” social events to draw parents to school to see students’ work.



62. Try an evening Curriculum Fair to give parents a better understanding of what’s being taught.
63. Try a “Family Math Night” to inform parents about the math curriculum through math games.
64. Try “refrigerator notes.” Ask students to “Take this note home and put it in the refrigerator.” That gets attention!

65. Know that parents are also looking to schools for help in dealing with non-academic problems (child care, raising adolescents, advice on drugs, sexual activity). Providing help can build parent support.
66. Understand one key reason for parent non-involvement: Lack of information. One memo won’t do. Try letters & notes & signs & calls & newspaper & radio & TV. Repetition works & works & works.
67. Transition Nights (or days, or afternoons) for parents and students getting ready to go to a new school help to answer questions, relieve anxieties, build involvement and generate support.
68. Want to get parents out for school meetings? Make children welcome by offering child care.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> These ideas from a presentation by John H. Wherry, Ed.D., President, The Parent Institute, P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474. The Parent Institute publishes the Educators’ Notebook on Family Involvement newsletter for school staff (from which all ideas for this handout have been taken), the Parents Make the Difference! newsletter for schools to distribute to parents of elementary grade children, the Parents STILL Make the Difference! newsletter for parents of secondary school children, as well as booklets and videos for parents. For information about publications and services call toll-free: 1-800-756-5525. Copyright © 1996, The Parent Institute. Permission granted for reproduction of this material if this credit message is included.

Support for family and community involvement begins with school administrators. Their willingness to recruit parents and community members for school tasks, to listen to other people's viewpoints, and to share decision making provides a necessary foundation for all school-family-community partnerships.

Ruth A. Mueller (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 1997)

# Family Involvement Resources

The following sources have been used to compile the information in this booklet. They offer great resources for families, schools and communities as they build partnerships for children's success.

## **AARP**

Grandparent Information Center  
601 E Street NW  
Washington DC 20049  
**Voice:** 800-424-3410  
**Web Address:**  
[www.aarp.org/grandparents/](http://www.aarp.org/grandparents/)

## **Beach Center on Families and Disability**

University of Kansas  
3111 Haworth Hall, Room 3136  
Lawrence KS 66045  
**Voice:** 785-864-7600  
**Web Address:** [www.beachcenter.org](http://www.beachcenter.org)

## **Center on School, Family and Community Partnerships**

Johns Hopkins University  
3505 North Charles Street  
Baltimore MD 21218  
**Voice:** 410-516-8807  
**Web Address:**  
[scov.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/center.htm](http://scov.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/center.htm)

## **Council for Exceptional Children**

1110 North Glebe Road #300  
Arlington VA 22201  
**Voice:** 800-224-6830  
**Web Address:** [www.cec.sped.org](http://www.cec.sped.org)

## **Families and Advocates Partnership for Education**

FAPE Coordinating Office - PACER Center,  
Inc.  
8161 Normandale Boulevard  
Minneapolis MN 55437  
**Voice:** 952-838-9000, 888-248-0822 **TTY:**  
952-838-0190  
**Web Address:** [www.fape.org](http://www.fape.org)

## **National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education (NCPIE)**

3929 Old Lee Highway, Suite 91-A  
Fairfax, VA 22030-2401  
**Voice:** 703-359-8973  
**Web Address:** <http://www.ncpie.org>

## **National Center for Family Literacy**

School Reform Initiatives  
325 West Main Street Suite 200  
Louisville KY 40202  
**Voice:** 502-584-1133  
**Web Address:** [www.famlit.org](http://www.famlit.org)

## **National Fatherhood Initiative**

101 Lake Forest Boulevard Suite 360  
Gaithersburg MD 20877  
**Voice:** 301-948-0599  
**Web Address:** [www.fatherhood.org](http://www.fatherhood.org)

## **National Head Start Association**

1651 Prince St  
Alexandria VA 22314  
**Voice:** 703-739-0875  
**Web Address:** [www.nhsa.org](http://www.nhsa.org)

## **National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (NICHCY)**

1825 Connecticut Ave NW Suite 700  
Washington DC 20009  
**Voice:** 800-695-0285 **TTY:** 202-884-8200  
**Web Address:** [www.nichcy.org](http://www.nichcy.org)

## **National Parent Information Network**

525 West 120th Street  
New York NY 10027  
**Voice:** 212-678-8179  
**Web Address:** [eric-web.tc.columbia.edu](http://eric-web.tc.columbia.edu)

**National Parent Teacher Association**

330 North Wabash Avenue Suite 2100  
Chicago IL 60611  
**Voice:** 800-307-4782  
**Web Address:** [www.pta.org](http://www.pta.org)

**NM Developmental Disabilities Supports  
Division (DDSD) (formerly Long Term Services)  
Family Infant Toddler Program**

1190 St. Francis Drive  
P.O. Box 26110, Santa Fe, NM 87502-6110  
**Voice:** 1-877-696-1472  
**Web Address:**  
<http://www.health.state.nm.us/ddsd>

**New Mexico Kids (Early Care, Education  
and Family Support)**

The Children, Youth and Families  
Department Office of Child Development  
**Voice:** 1-800 691-9067  
**Web Address:** [www.newmexicokids.org](http://www.newmexicokids.org)

**New Mexico Public Education  
Department**

300 Don Gaspar  
Santa Fe, NM 87501-2786  
**Voice:** 505-827-1457  
**Web Address:** <http://ped.state.nm.us/>

**PACER Center, Inc.**

8161 Normandale Boulevard  
Minneapolis MN 55437  
**Voice:** 952-838-9000 **TTY:** 952-838-0190  
**Web Address:** [www.pacer.org](http://www.pacer.org)

**TASH Equity, Opportunity and  
Inclusion for People with Disabilities**

29 W. Susquehanna Avenue, Suite 210  
Baltimore, MD 21204  
**Voice:** 410-828-8274  
**Web Address:** [www.tash.org](http://www.tash.org)

**The Parent Institute**

P.O. Box 7474  
Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474  
**Voice:** 1-800-756-5525  
**Web Address:** [www.parent-institute.com](http://www.parent-institute.com)

**U.S. Department of Education\***

330 C Street SW  
Washington DC 20202  
**Voice:** 202-205-9220  
**Web Address:** [www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov)

### Parents Reaching Out

We wish to thank the families and our community partners in New Mexico for their thoughtful review and commitment as we developed this booklet. In addition to the resources noted, *Family Involvement—Building Community Partnerships* has been developed with information from the following sources:

Mountain Plains Regional Resource Center (MPRRC)

New Mexico Public Education Department

PACER Center, Inc.

Technical Assistance Alliance for Parent Centers

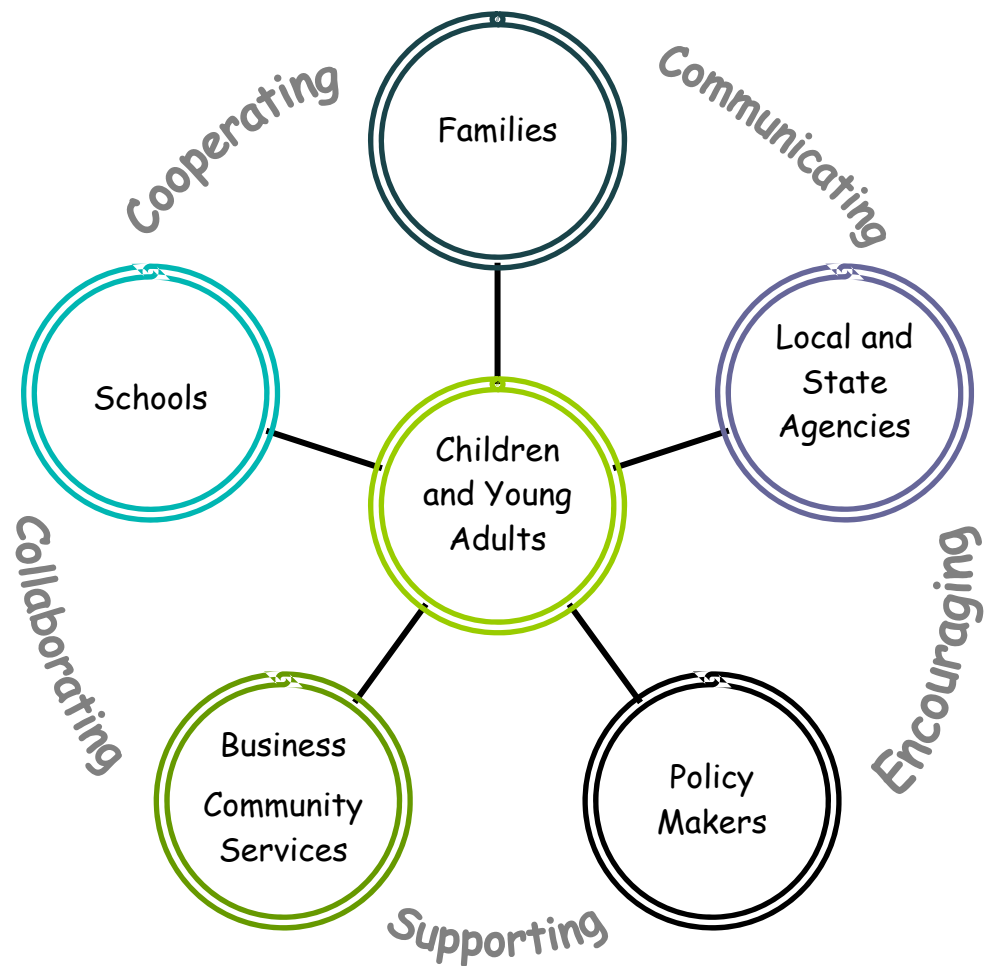
U.S. Department of Education



*"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world.*

*Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."*

Margaret Mead



# Parents Reaching Out

*Your One Stop Resource for a Stronger Family*

As a statewide non-profit organization, we connect with parents, caregivers, educators and other professionals to promote healthy, positive and caring experiences for New Mexico families and children. We have served New Mexico families for over twenty five years. Our staff and Family Leadership Action Network volunteers reflect the unique diversity of the communities throughout our state.

Children do not come with instructions on how to deal with the difficult circumstances that many families experience. Parents Reaching Out believes that families' needs go beyond the bounds of formal services. *What we can offer to each other is uniquely ours. We have all been there.*

## Our Mission

The mission of Parents Reaching Out is to enhance positive outcomes for families and children in New Mexico through informed decision making, advocacy, education, and resources. Parents Reaching Out provides the networking opportunities for families to connect with and support each other. This mission supports *all families* including those who have children with disabilities, and others who are disenfranchised. Parents Reaching Out achieves this by:

- Developing family leadership
- Connecting families to each other
- Building collaborative partnerships
- Providing families knowledge and tools to enhance their power

## Our Beliefs

- Families need support where ever they are in their journey.
- All families care deeply about their children.
- Families may need tools and support to accomplish their dreams.
- All families are capable of making informed decisions that are right for their family.
- Families in the state benefit from our organization having the staff and materials that meet their diversity.
- Systems that listen carefully to the family perspective improve outcomes for our children.

We invite all families and those serving families and children in New Mexico to make *Parents Reaching Out your one stop resource for a stronger family.* Our publications, workshops, and Resource Center offer tools for informed decision-making and building partnerships in communities. Our trained staff and network of volunteers are here to serve you.

*Parents Reaching Out is the home of:*

NM Parent Information and Resource Center (NMPIRC)

NM Parent Training and Information Center (NMPTIC)

NM Family to Family Health Information Center (NMF2FHIC)

## Parents Reaching Out

1920 B Columbia Drive, SE

Albuquerque, NM 87106

1-505-247-0192 ♦ 1-800-524-5176

[www.parentsreachingout.org](http://www.parentsreachingout.org)

From I-25—take the Gibson Blvd Exit 222 and go East on Gibson. Turn left at the third stop light (Girard). Turn left on Vail. Go one block to Columbia. Turn left on Columbia. Parents Reaching Out is on the east side of the street. Welcome!

