

Providing guidance for leaders dedicated to children's literacy development, birth to age 9

IMPLEMENTING FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE

The Issue: In many educational settings, particularly those serving vulnerable populations, the literacy benefits of productive and positive school-family partnerships are missed. Implementing a literacy-based family partnership plan effectively is essential for changing behaviors that impact children's literacy development.

What Are Some Common Pitfalls That Impede Impact?

Common Pitfalls	What We're Learning
1. Communicating only with families who initiate conversations about their children's learning.	1. All families want to support their children's learning; it is the responsibility of site leaders and staff to leverage this common goal and build partnerships.
2. Interacting with families primarily when children misbehave or problems arise.	2. Solid relationships between educators and families are more productive for learning and behavior, and make potentially tough conversations easier.
3. Interacting with families primarily when there are school social events.	3. Social events are helpful for building relationships, but not enough for building literacy! Productive family partnerships revolve around children's learning and progress.
4. Engaging in a one-way information campaign from school to home (e.g., report cards, newsletters).	4. Two-way channels of communication about children's learning and progress help families and educators support literacy development.

For More on This...

- ◆ Check out [Encouraging Your Child to Read](#), produced by Harvard Graduate School of Education for the documentary, *Waiting for "Superman"*
- ◆ Home language-building activities are available at [Washington Learning Systems](#) and [Reading Rockets](#)
- ◆ Get ideas for interactive homework at [Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork \(TIPS\)](#)

What Are Key Decisions and Strategies for Impact?

For partnerships with families to have an impact on children's literacy development, they must revolve around the common goal of supporting children's learning. With this goal in mind, leaders and staff should:

Build relationships with all families

- Connect families to your community [e.g., welcome families on site, conduct home visits, encourage volunteerism (Memos 12 & 13)]
- Regularly create forums for families to ask questions
- Make interpreters available for non-English speaking families
- Translate newsletters into languages families understand

Share literacy progress with families

- Provide families with regular, timely, and accessible updates about their children's literacy progress
- Check in to make sure that families understand their children's literacy needs and how to help them

Encourage families to read, talk, and play

- Provide tools to help families connect home activities to classroom learning (e.g., word games, conversation starters, all types of books—including multilingual and wordless picture books)
- Give concrete suggestions on texts to read at home, on games that build literacy skills, and on how to have elaborative conversations
- Suggest community activities that will build children's knowledge and support their literacy development

Self-study for Impact: Lead the Conversation!

- *Have we included all families in our partnership efforts, valuing and honoring our families' diverse strengths?*
- *Do we communicate regularly with all families about their children's literacy in ways that are honest, respectful, and useful?*
- *Do we regularly provide specific activities that families can engage in at home to promote literacy learning?*

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