



Family & Community Engagement Committee Report

Spring 2010

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Natalie Olsen (Fox Meadow Elementary) – Chairperson

Kristie Guiney (South Elgin High School)

Lisa Miller (Hanover Countryside Elementary)

Eric Klekamp (Lowrie Elementary)

DISTRICT LIAISONS

Karen Fox (Chief of Family & Community Engagement)

Karla Guzman (Parent/Community Outreach Coordinator)

Approved by CAC Executive Committee – February 25, 2010

Approved by CAC General Council – April 11, 2010

Presented to the Board of Education – May 17, 2010

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The CAC Parent & Community Engagement Committee would like to thank Karen Fox and Karla Guzman of District U-46 for their support and collaboration -- and U-46 for inviting us to engage with them on what Family Engagement in U-46 should be all about.

"The more the relationship between families and the school is a real partnership, the more student achievement increases. When schools engage families in ways that are linked to improving learning, students make better gains. When families are engaged in positive ways, rather than labeled as problems, schools can be transformed from places where only certain students prosper to ones where all children do well." — Beyond the Bake Sale

COMMITTEE MISSION & INITIATIVES FOR 2009-2010

The CAC Parent & Community Engagement Committee is dedicated to strengthening family and community participation in the improvement of student achievement at the school and district levels. Our goals for the current year:

- Work with the District on the development of a comprehensive family and community engagement plan as outlined in the 2009-2010 District Improvement Plan and Board Policy 8.010 (including a three-tiered action plan outlining engagement expectations at every level in the district).
- Work with the district on the development of a comprehensive, district-wide survey on the current climate of engagement throughout the district.
- Continue to build a resource bank of engagement ideas from other school districts, national experts on engagement (case studies and research) and successful programs at U-46 schools.
- Make recommendations on how the district can implement ideas for improving parent-school partnerships.

SUMMARY OF COMMITTEE WORK

Following a busy year compiling dozens of valuable engagement resources, the Family and Community Engagement Committee continued its work this year by supporting the district's efforts in developing a district strategy on Family Engagement. The committee's work now falls under the guidance of Karen Fox, who was named Chief of Family & Community Engagement (July 2009), and is assisted by Karla Guzman, Parent/Community Outreach Coordinator. The committee met four times before the writing of this report: September (welcome); October and November (research review); and January (survey and SIP reviews).

RESEARCH

The committee spent the first few months reviewing some of the research garnered from the previous year. The committee felt that these resources provided some strong examples/direction on where we could go with engagement in U-46. These included:

- *Seattle Public Schools: SFP District Plan*
- Epstein's Framework for Involvement
- A New Wave of Evidence (SEDL)
- District Leadership Action Plan (NNPS)
- Lead & Succeed: District Inventory (NNPS)

The committee strongly felt that the **Epstein's Framework** model provided the best framework for which to develop a comprehensive engagement strategy for U-46. The framework is simple to understand, covers all areas of engagement and is greatly supported by resources on a national level. The PTA Standards for engagement – which is part of the PTA standards already adopted by the U-46 Board of Education – is based on the Epstein model. Since U-46 has already adopted this model, it makes the most sense for the district to build its plan upon this foundation. The Six Types of Involvement:

1. **Parenting** – Families help create a home environment that supports children in their learning.
2. **Home-School Communication** – Effective two-way communication (from home to school and school to home) about school progress and the child's progress on all levels (academic, social and emotional).
3. **Volunteering** – Finding ways to help out at school, in the district or at home.
4. **Support Learning at Home** – Schools and families work together to find ways in which families can help with homework and other school-related activities at home.

5. **Decision-making** – Families and schools/district collaborate in school decisions; families are given the opportunity to have input into policies and decisions that affect their child's education.
6. **Collaborating with the Community** – Developing partnerships with the community to strengthen school programs, family practices and student learning.

The idea behind the framework is for schools to build family and community engagement plans that encompass all six of these engagement types. Examples of how to effectively implement the model were included in the 2008-2009 report; the committee will continue to work with district administration in compiling these resources into a usable format for school principals and parent leaders.

To effectively implement the Epstein Framework, a school's first step is to build and maintain successful partnerships between families and the school. According to Karen L. Mapp, author of *Beyond the Bake Sale*, all schools need to develop engagement plans that detail how it will be:

- **Welcoming:** Families are made to feel at home, comfortable and part of the school community
- **Honoring:** Family members are respected, validated and affirmed for any type of contribution they make.
- **Connecting:** School staff and families put children at the center and connect on education issues of common interest designed to improve educational opportunities for the children.

More information on successful ways to welcome, honor and connect with families will also be included in the engagement resource toolbox.

The committee also strongly recommended that the district look to **Seattle Public Schools SFP District Plan** (www.seattleschools.org/area/fam/documents/SFPDistrictPlan1.pdf) as a model for how to develop a detailed engagement strategy; the Seattle plan is modeled on Epstein's Framework. The committee felt that the plan clearly outlined the specific steps to be taken in each of the six framework areas by each of the stakeholders in engagement: district administration, school staff and parents/families. The plan makes it very clear who is to do what, and includes accountability and success measurements. The Seattle Plan is easily accessed on its website and serves as a model for individual school implementation. The district has made contact with Seattle Public Schools and is looking to get more detailed information on development and implementation of a successful plan; interestingly, the representative from Seattle said the district was currently reviewing its engagement plan. The committee will continue to follow their work.

SURVEY

The committee also provided feedback on an upcoming survey on communication and family engagement being conducted by the district. The survey includes seven questions; each will have a comment window for responders to expound, which the committee was very positive about. The questions related to family engagement were selected from the resources provided in last year's CAC report. The committee also recommended that the responders should note what school their survey was regarding; the committee felt it was important to be able to track positive and negative comments back to the school level so that improvements could be made or successes shared. The committee looks forward to discussing results of the survey with the district and hopes to use the information to further its committee work by identifying areas where schools could use additional support and by adding to the resource bank of ideas.

SIP PLANS/ENGAGEMENT REVIEW

The committee also helped compile a master list of family engagement activities listed in the individual elementary schools' School Improvement Plans. Committee members looked through an assigned list of SIPs to identify common activities that schools engage in with families in the areas of Reading and Math. The committee also noted other engagement ideas listed in the SIPs and drew special attention to ones that were new or different strategies used to engage families. This master list will provide another glimpse into what is currently being done in the areas of family engagement throughout the district and can serve as a resource tool for fellow schools. The committee's next task will be to classify the activities according to Epstein's Framework to give us a better picture where U-46 falls on the engagement spectrum.

The committee also reviewed the strategies identified in all the SIP summaries, which were provided to the Board of Education in December 2009. Committee members are assisting staff in identifying the best way for schools to identify and communicate their strategies.

CONTINUED WORK

For the remainder of the school year, the committee will help develop a resource tool box for school principals to use when developing their school's engagement plans. The committee wants to ensure that schools' engagement efforts align to Epstein's Framework, so that we are all working toward the same goals and measuring success according to the same model. The committee provided an exhaustive report of resources in its 2008-2009 report for the district and individual schools to use; the committee does not

want schools to recreate work that has already been done for them. Ideally, this resource tool kit will be available for principals prior to next school year (2010-2011).

We do not believe that Family Engagement is simply a "program" to be implemented; it is not a separate entity or initiative. Engagement should be a mindset that permeates every aspect of a school's activity -- an action item and goal in every plan and program designed to improve children's success. From ISATs to intervention, PBIS to reading improvement, college preparedness to school improvement -- in everything that relates to students -- engaging with families and our communities to be part of process should be how U-46 does business.

RECOMMENDATION

- **The committee recommends that the district continue its collaborative work with this committee on Family & Community Engagement.**