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Family & Community Engagement Committee Report

Spring 2011

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Natalie Olsen (Fox Meadow Elementary) – Chairperson

Kristie Guiney (South Elgin High School)

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DISTRICT LIAISONS

Karen Fox (Chief of Family & Community Engagement)

Karla Guzman (Parent/Community Outreach Coordinator)

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"The common one-dimensional vision of parental involvement – that it's about volunteering time for school functions or serving as a room parent – completely misses the mark. For students to succeed in school, parents must understand the basics of what's going on inside the classroom, have performance information that they can understand and evaluate, and be equipped with the tools to interact with school teachers and leaders to address student performance concerns."
~ "It Takes a Parent" Report, Project Appleseed

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The CAC Family & Community Engagement Committee would like to thank Karen Fox and Karla Guzman of District U-46 for all of their support and collaboration and U-46 for continuing to engage with CAC on Family Engagement in U-46. The committee appreciates being able to work side-by-side with administration on the development of engagement practices– which is what engagement is all about – and see its efforts put into use in real time.

COMMITTEE MISSION & INITIATIVES FOR 2010-2011

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 administration on the development of Family & Community Engagement strategies.

- Develop a roadmap to help schools develop and implement their family engagement plans.

- Develop family-friendly definitions of the Six Components of Engagement and identify key goals in each component area.

- Identify schools willing to let us document their process or let us help them develop their engagement plans, which will later serve as a resource for other schools.

- Continue to build a resource bank of engagement ideas from other school districts, national experts on engagement (case studies, research) and successful programs at U-46 schools.

SUMMARY OF COMMITTEE WORK

For its third year of work, the Family and Community Engagement Committee concentrated on developing resources to help schools better understand what engagement is and help them develop and implement effective engagement plans according to the U-46 Six Components of Engagement.

SIX COMPONENTS OF ENGAGEMENT

Following last year's report, the committee and Karen Fox continued to discuss what U-46 should use as its engagement model. While we had narrowed our focus down to Joyce Epstein's Six Types of Involvement as well as the PTA's National Standards for Engagement (which is based on Epstein's model), the committee ultimately did not feel that either met U-46's needs completely. With the committee's input, Karen Fox customized the models into the **U-46 Six Components of Engagement** (Appendix A), which became a primary resource in the Engagement Toolbox (see next section). The idea behind the component framework is to define the specific areas in which schools need to engage families and the community. The Six Components are:

- Welcoming Families to Schools
- Communicating Effectively
- Supporting Student Learning
- Increasing Opportunities & Advocating for All Students
- Sharing Decision-Making
- Collaborating with the Community

All of our schools are engaging their learning communities, but the breadth and depth varies, according to our informal research. *The committee's goal is for every school to develop an Engagement Plan that fulfills all of the goals outlined in the U-46 Six Components of Engagement **and** addresses the unique needs of the school.* The latter part is crucial in the committee's opinion. Each school's engagement plan should be designed to meet the needs of its *unique* learning community. What works at one school may not work at another; and a template engagement plan will not produce the same results as one that is designed with purpose and people in mind. For engagement to be truly successful, a school needs to first determine (a) what its community's needs are and (b) what it needs to improve and then develop a plan to address those two areas.

To help schools in this effort, the committee developed family-friendly definitions of these six engagement components, as well as goals within each component. The intent is to provide schools and families with a clear idea of what schools should be doing in each of the six areas. The document will be provided to schools for use next school year. (See Appendix A.) Additionally, Karen Fox has outlined benchmarks for Destination 2015 that will be used to assess success and progress in each of these six areas. The committee will continue to develop and provide schools with resources specific to these areas.

TOOLBOX

The committee also assisted Karen Fox with the development of the Engagement Toolbox, a compilation of the top engagement resources schools need to get started with developing their engagement plans. These resources include the district's customized Six Components of Engagement, SIP Summaries (engagement activities), PTA National Standards for Family-School Partnerships, in-district examples of activities by engagement component, and more. Packets containing these materials were given to principals prior to the start of school. The committee will continue to work with administration on developing additional materials to be used in the toolbox.

ENGAGEMENT ROADMAP

After talking with the committee members' schools and getting feedback from the district, the committee discussed additional resources it could provide to help schools with the development of their engagement plans. The committee realized that while a lot of great resources had been provided in the Engagement Toolbox, some schools were not sure what to do with the materials or what the expectations of implementation were (who is responsible, what it should include, who should be involved).

To address this concern and provide all district schools with a unified model of implementation, the committee created a "roadmap" on how to develop and implement an engagement plan according to the new district standards. Using resources gathered in previous years, the committee developed a step-by-step guide on how to get started (see Appendix B). It covers establishing a team; developing a mission statement and goals; assessing where the school is currently at and what its needs are; developing a plan; getting feedback on the plan; implementation; and assessment.

Several of the committee members' schools have agreed to partner with the committee in their efforts to develop and implement engagement plans. In some instances, the committee will document the work a school is already doing; in others, they will either assist or lead the school through the process, using the Roadmap as the guide. This will help the committee evaluate the guide and determine where adjustments need to be made and what additional resources are needed. The committee hopes to begin partnering with these schools next year and will document the experience to share with other schools. The committee has been invited to assist with the analysis of the spring and fall survey results to determine appropriate feedback to the district and schools.

SURVEY

Karen Fox discussed with the committee the responses from the Communications survey conducted in the spring of 2010. The survey included seven questions related to school climate/family engagement, which were developed with the input of the committee. Since the family engagement survey will be repeated on an annual basis and results will used to assess progress for Destination 2015, the committee worked with Karen Fox to expand the number of questions so that all six engagement areas are addressed.

PTA NATIONAL STANDARDS

The committee also reviewed the PTA National Standards for Family-School Partnerships and determined it is valuable tool that can be used by U-46 schools in the development and implementation of their engagement plans. This document provides in-depth explanations, examples and goals for each of the Six Component areas. Additionally, it includes a very detailed assessment component that schools can use for self-evaluation (by the engagement team) and a family survey, both of which specifically relate to the six component areas. This resource is available for free on the PTA's website and provides U-46 with instant access to further implementation resources (http://www.pta.org/2757.asp).

RECOMMENDATION

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

Family Engagement is not 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 should be how U-46 does business.
~ CAC Family Engagement Committee 2010 Report

Six Components of Family and Community Engagement

1. **Welcoming Families to Schools**   *Create a welcoming school environment for all families so they develop a sense of belonging and feel valued and appreciated, leading to active participation in children's education.*
2. **Communicating Effectively**   *Develop effective, meaningful two-way communication between families and school staff in order to share information about what students are learning.*
3. **Supporting Student Learning**   *Collaborate with families to strengthen their knowledge and skills so they can support student learning and development at home and at school.*
4. **Increasing Opportunities & Advocating for All Students**   *Educate families on how the school system works and empower them to become advocates for all children, to ensure equal access to learning opportunities that contribute to student success.*
5. **Sharing Decision-making with Stakeholders**   *Engage families as equal partners and share the responsibility of influencing decisions on policy and programs that will affect all children.*
6. **Collaborating with the Community**   *Work with local businesses, community organizations, agencies and institutions of higher learning to connect students, families and staff to expanded learning opportunities and resources.*

U-46 Family & Community Engagement components are based on research/publications including *Joyce Epstein's Six Types of Involvement* and the *National PTA Standards.*

"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

A Roadmap for Developing a Successful Family Engagement Plan

This roadmap was developed by the CAC Family & Community Engagement Committee to help school principals and their engagement teams develop successful Family-Community Engagement Plans, as directed by U-46 Board of Education Policy. The goal is for every school to develop an Engagement Plan that addresses all of the U-46 Six Components of Engagement and meets the unique needs of its particular learning community. What works at one school may not work at another; and using a "template" engagement plan will not produce the same results as one that is designed with purpose and people in mind. For engagement to be truly successful, a school needs to determine what its learning community's needs are and what it needs to improve upon and then develop a plan to address those two areas. *Beyond the Bake Sale*, by Karen Mapp and Anne Henderson, and the PTA National Standards for Family-School Partnerships, provide the basis for this roadmap and are highly recommended resources for schools.

WHAT STEPS DO SCHOOLS NEED TO TAKE?

A. ESTABLISH A FAMILY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TEAM

1. This team will be responsible for planning and continually improving family and community engagement within its learning community. The team will develop an Engagement Plan that meets the goals outlined in the U-46 Six Components of Engagement and addresses the unique needs of the school. The team will ensure that school, family and community partnerships are well-designed, well-integrated and goal-oriented. (*Beyond the Bake Sale*, pp. 44-45)

2. The team's goals should include:

   - Developing a Team Mission Statement, Goals and Timeline

   - Developing an Engagement Plan

   - Implementing the Engagement Plan

   - Assessing the success of and improving the Engagement Plan

3. The school principal is responsible for overseeing the development of the engagement plan and team's efforts (see Board Policy 8.01). The team should consist of the principal, parents, teachers and community members in your learning community.

A. DEVELOP A FAMILY ENGAGEMENT MISSION STATEMENT/GOALS/TIMELINE

1. What is the purpose of this team (mission) and what do you plan to accomplish (goals) by implementing the engagement plan?

2. What are your school's core beliefs about Family Engagement? (*BTBS*, chapter 3)

3. What do you want Family & Community Engagement to look like at your school?

   - What might a school look like that has created a genuine culture of school-family-community partnership and that has made real progress toward high social and academic achievement for all students? Is your school a Partnership School, an Open-Door School, a Come-if-We-Call School or a Fortress school? (*BTBS*, pp. 14-19).

   - What do you want people to say about your school? (*BTBS*, pp. 20-22)

   - What do you want people to say about your school's practices and policies to engage families and the community? (*BTBS*, pp. 22-23)

3. What is the timeline for developing, implementing and assessing the Engagement Plan?

B. ASSESS THE CURRENT CLIMATE OF FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AT YOUR SCHOOL

1. What are your school's current practices for engaging families and the community in improving school climate and student success? How successful is your school currently? Where do you need to make improvements?

   - Do you have specific policies/practices in place that address the U-46 Six Components of Engagement? Are your practices designed to meet the goals of these components?

   - Do your engagement efforts address the specific needs of your learning community?

   - How well is your school doing according to the PTA's National Standards of Family-School Partnerships Assessment Guide? This document provides a detailed assessment component that schools can use for self-evaluation and a family survey, both of which specifically relate to the six component areas. This resource is available for free on the PTA's website and provides U-46 with instant access to further implementation resources (http://www.pta.org/2757.asp).

   - How closely is your school's engagement efforts linked to student learning? (*BTBS*, p. 108)

   - What is the feedback of the team?

2. How well does your school community feel your school is engaging families and the community in improving school climate and student success? The team needs a broad-base of feedback to determine if its assessment (see #1 above) is consistent with what the learning community says.

- Conduct surveys of your learning community to assess how well you engage families at your school in all six areas of engagement:
    - PTA's Power of Partnerships Family Survey (http://www.pta.org/2757.asp)
    - How Family-Friendly is Your School? (*BTBS*, pp. 75-79)
    - How Closely is Your School's Parent Involvement Program Linked to Student Learning? (*BTBS*, pp. 108-111)
    - How Well Does Your School Support Parents as Advocates? (*BTBS*, pp. 182-185)
    - How Well is Your School Bridging Racial, Class and Cultural Differences? (*BTBS*, p. 146)
    - How Well is Your School Sharing Power and Practicing Democracy? (*BTBS*, pp. 214)
- Conduct "welcoming walk-through" assessments (*BTBS*, pp. 311-314).
- Host two-way discussions with staff and families to find out how people perceive your school and whether or not the school is engaging in all six component areas.
- Administer staff/administration assessments.

3. Review all survey data to determine what engagement areas need improvement or new development.

C. DEVELOP A FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN THAT ADDRESSES THE SCHOOL'S NEEDS ACCORDING TO THE SIX COMPONENTS OF ENGAGEMENT.

1. An engagement plan commits a school to certain goals and actions in its efforts to improve Family/Community Engagement. It describes the effective partnership between the school and its families and lays out how and when that will happen and who will do what. (*BTBS*, p. 314)

2. The plan should address all Six Components of Engagement, detailing specific action that will be taken to make improvement in these areas. See the PTA National Standards for Family-School Partnerships Implementation Guide (http://www.pta.org/2757.asp).

3. The plan should address the unique needs of the school community and address any issues identified in the assessment (see C). While the plan may be based on a template, it should be expanded and/or customized for the specific school; no one attends a template school.

4. The plan should include training opportunities for staff and families.

5. The plan should include benchmarks and an assessment plan with specific dates for evaluation.

6. The plan should include a Family-School-Community Compact that outlines what each party's role and responsibilities in improving engagement; the compact is a commitment or promise.

7. Create a Family-School-Community Compact that specifies how all parties will share the responsibility for improving students' academic progress, how families and the school will build a partnership to help children meet standards, and how they will communicate regularly.

8. Resources:

- U-46 Six Components of Engagement Worksheet
- PTA National Standards for Family-School Partnerships Implementation Guide
- *Beyond the Bake Sale*

D. GET COMMUNITY FEEDBACK ON THE PROPOSED ENGAGEMENT PLAN:

1. Present the plan and compact to families, staff and community members for feedback.
2. Make changes to the plan to reflect any concerns/deficits revealed in feedback.
3. Finalize Engagement Plan and Family-School-Community Compact.
4. Determine how the team will introduce the final Engagement Plan and compact to your staff and learning community.
   a) How will the plan be communicated?
   b) How will you encourage participation?
   c) What opportunities will be available for parents to learn more and receive training?

E. PUT ENGAGEMENT PLAN INTO ACTION & MONITOR PROGRESS

1. Develop a timeline for assessing the progress and success of the Engagement Plan. How often will you meet? When will you do follow-up surveys? How will you implement changes?
2. Be flexible and make changes as needed or as your community changes. What works next year may not work in five years.
3. Monitor results of Destination 2015 surveys to ensure your school is making progress in all six engagement areas.

"Every person who is interested in supporting children's development should have equal status, value and responsibility. That means starting from the premise that everyone has something to offer and that everyone should get something positive out of the relationship." ~ Beyond the Bake Sale