It is suggested that this presentation be viewed with school leadership and staff as a tool for assessing your school's level of parent and community involvement. Please realize that the term "parent" is inclusive of any family member who has responsibility for a child's education.

School Reading Plan

- Broaden the school's commitment to include:
  - Parents and families
  - Businesses
  - Community organizations
  - Citizens
- Share the School Reading Plan to:
  - Communicate the commitment of school staff
  - Inform others of objectives and progress toward them
  - Increase the likelihood others will become involved and promote literacy efforts

Now would be the time to review your school's current reading plan. Does it demonstrate your commitment to families and the community? Are there additions and/or revisions you want to include to reflect this? What steps have you taken or do you plan to take, to share the school's reading goals and data with key stakeholders, thereby increasing their understanding and the likelihood they will become more involved in and supportive of your literacy efforts?

Promote Reading as a Priority

- Encourage parents and families to participate in all facets of their child's education and to support reading activities outside of school
- Engage organizations, businesses and citizens to promote adult participation in education
- Demonstrate the benefits of academically successful students and maximize the resources available to support learning

School, family, and community partnerships are a vital component of a district leadership plan and school organization. Engaging the broader community has a positive impact on student learning when well-planned and implemented. Talk with your leadership team about steps your school has taken to meet this challenge and brainstorm other avenues to explore. This topic will be discussed in more detail later in the presentation.

School-Family-Community Partnerships

- Assess your school's progress in the six areas of parent involvement:
  - Improving Communication
  - Promoting Positive Parenting
  - Enhancing Student Learning
  - Increasing Volunteerism
  - Supporting Decision Making and Advocacy
  - Collaborating with the Community

http://www.cesdp.nmhu.edu/toolkit/survey.asp

Adapted from the work of Dr. Joyce Epstein, et al, 2002

Educators and researchers are united in their agreement on the importance of strong relationships between schools, families and communities. The New Mexico Public Education Department sponsored the development, by the Center for the Education and Study of Diverse Populations (CESDP), of a "Toolkit for New Mexico School Communities," which contains extensive resources on these six areas of partnerships - Improving Communication; Promoting Positive Parenting; Enhancing Student Learning; Increasing Volunteerism; Supporting Decision Making and Advocacy; and Collaborating with the Community.

Your school's staff may benefit from completing the "Survey for Assessing School Level Family and Community Partnerships" which was adapted from the work of Dr. Joyce Epstein and contained in the Toolkit. Based on the results of your surveys, priority areas can be targeted for your work. Each of the areas is extensively studied within the six modules and includes a Self-Assessment rubric for teachers and a Reflection on current practices. Resources provided in the module can be accessed to support improvement and suggest professional development . A companion Parent-Family Reflection may be used to foster engagement and provide families with the opportunity to reflect on their own perceptions and involvement. You may access this survey through the link provided here and as Practice Activity #1.

http://www.cesdp.nmhu.edu/toolkit/survey.asp

To Begin With:

- Improve Communication
- Enhance Student Learning
- Support Decision Making
- Collaborate

During this presentation, we will primarily focus on four of the areas to develop ways of engaging parents and community members with the goals of your school. Improving communication between schools, families, and communities is at the heart of building strong relationships, trust and support. Teachers may require additional training in ways to achieve this and in ways to productively enhance student learning through activities outside of the classroom. Leadership may require support in how to effectively include the community in decision-making and ways to strengthen collaboration between the school, families, businesses and other organizations, which are all vital to a school's success.

Communication

- Provide parents/families with specific information about curriculum and reading goals
- Ensure parents know their child's level and progress in reading skill development
- Utilize phone calls, notes, emails, newsletters, a frequently updated website, and more personal contacts to keep parents informed and encourage family support

Examine the process in place at your school for providing student progress information to parents. Does your school invite families to a beginning of the year "Open House" where teachers can explain the school reading program in more detail? Do parent conferences occur at least once a year and do they include sufficient time for explaining data, student achievement, specific student plans and/or interventions in place? Are reporting systems clearly explained to parents? What additional means are used for communication in between conferences? Consider having teacher goals of 5 brief parent contacts per week to keep the lines of communication open and ensure parents know their child's progress throughout the year.

Family Involvement

- http://www.cesdp.nmhu.edu/toolkit/improving-communication/family-involvement.asp
- http://www.cesdp.nmhu.edu/toolkit/improving-communication/communication-ideas-for-parents.asp

For additional information, you may find the suggestions in these two handouts from the New Mexico Toolkit helpful: "Family Involvement Ideas: Communication" and "Communication Ideas for Parents". These are also listed as Practice Activity #2.

http://www.cesdp.nmhu.edu/toolkit/improving-communication/family-involvement.asp
http://www.cesdp.nmhu.edu/toolkit/improving-communication/communication-ideas-for-parents.asp

Communication

- Relate student progress to the school reading plan:
- – Report both summative and formative data and use it for goal setting, keeping reading achievement an ongoing priority
  - – What is the school doing to maintain and accelerate students who are reading at grade level or above?
  - – What is the school doing instructionally for students who are not reading at grade level?

To keep the focus on reading achievement, it's important for teachers to regularly report on the individual student level with parents and families. Additionally, leadership should report to the school district and larger community on the grade level and school level data to demonstrate gains being made, areas of strength and areas needing more support. Ensure that your school's reading plan demonstrates how the needs of all learners is being met and how reading is a priority at your school, reflected in schedules and allocation of resources.

Enhance Student Learning

- Learning at home has positive results for students:
  - Positive interactions with parents and families around school progress
  - More positive attitude about homework and school
  - Improved self-confidence as a learner
  - Increased skill practice and homework completion
  - Provides accountability for school performance

Appropriate and well-constructed home activities provide a structure for students to share their learning with families, demonstrate their progress and receive support with their challenges. When children and families regularly engage in such a way, both will experience more positive feelings toward school.

Enhance Student Learning

- Learning at home has positive results for parents and families:
  - Deeper understanding of instructional program and what children are learning
  - Improved knowledge of how to support, encourage, monitor and help children at home
  - Increased interaction with children and understanding of skill levels
  - Increased discussion at home about school, class work, and future plans
  - Reinforcing learning in school, rather than teaching new content

The benefits of a regular home learning program – or homework routine – are many, not only for the students, but for the families. This can be a challenge for many families and teachers must therefore provide some degree of training and resources to ensure the interactions are positive. Parents need to see that they are not expected to teach new skills at home, but are instead providing support and an environment conducive to learning.

Enhance Student Learning

- Suggestions for reading activities outside of school should:
  - Be encouraged in a positive manner
  - Be provided with guidance and support
  - Be appropriate to your parent/family population
  - Respect family time
  - http://www.cesdp.nmhu.edu/toolkit/enhancing-student-learning/purposes-benefits-of-homework.asp
  - http://www.cesdp.nmhu.edu/toolkit/enhancing-student-learning/overcoming-homework-struggles.asp
  - http://www.ode.state.or.us/search/page/?id=2837

Keep your efforts focused on two-way communication about learning. What strategies for supporting parents in helping children with homework have been successful? What hasn't worked and why? How can teachers and parents become better partners in education? Your school may want to plan monthly family reading nights to introduce parents to strategies beneficial to reading at home.

These links will take you to handouts from the NM Toolkit, which you may find especially useful – "Purposes and Benefits of Homework" and "Overcoming Homework Struggles" which you may adapt to fit your school or district. These two handouts can be accessed through the link to Practice Activity #3.

For additional recommendations for how parents and families can support reading skills at home in grades K-3 and grades 4 and up, refer to the Oregon Literacy Framework, chapter 6, "Commitment" through the link listed on this slide.

http://www.cesdp.nmhu.edu/toolkit/enhancing-student-learning/purposes-benefits-of-homework.asp

http://www.cesdp.nmhu.edu/toolkit/enhancing-student-learning/overcoming-homework-struggles.asp

http://www.ode.state.or.us/search/page/?id=2837

"Decision Making" means a process of partnership of shared views and actions toward shared goals, not a power struggle between conflicting ideas.

(Adapted from Epstein et al., 2004)

How do teachers and leaders at your school and in your district support parent and advocacy organizations and encourage parent leadership and decision making? The work of Dr. Joyce Epstein and colleagues clearly defines decision making as a partnership.

Decision Making

- Create an awareness of school, district and state policies, standards and the School Reading Plan
- Ensure that all families are supported and recognized for their attributes and leadership
- Stronger involvement will result when school, home and community partnerships are committed to shared decision making
- Include students in decision making and advocating for themselves

Educating families and the community about policies, standards and your school's reading plan is a first step toward stronger partnerships and shared decision-making. See if opportunities are available to include parent representatives in professional development around schoolwide programs. Even at young ages, students can often be included in making decisions about classroom policies and how to advocate for themselves. Older students can play an active role in school and district decision-making.

Decision Making

"Parents and educators depend on shared authority in decision making systems to foster parental trust, public confidence and mutual support of each other's efforts in helping students succeed. The involvement of parents, as individuals or as representative of others, is crucial in the collaborative decision making process..."

(National PTA, 2002)

- http://www.cesdp.nmhu.edu/toolkit/supporting-decision-making-advocacy/dm-at-school-level.asp
- http://www.cesdp.nmhu.edu/toolkit/supporting-decision-making-advocacy/involving-families-in-dm.asp

The National PTA confirms the importance of sharing decision-making as a means of fostering public trust and mutual support. Two more handouts from the New Mexico Toolkit may help guide your efforts in this area – "Decision Making at the School Level"; and a family tool titled "Rate Your School" to evaluate how your school involves families in the decision making process. These materials are linked to Practice Activity #4.

http://www.cesdp.nmhu.edu/toolkit/supporting-decision-making-advocacy/dm-at-school-level.asp
http://www.cesdp.nmhu.edu/toolkit/supporting-decision-making-advocacy/involving-families-in-dm.asp

Participation

- Site-based management teams
- Parental advisory committees for reading, special education, and/or bilingual programs
- Classroom committees
- School task force
- Job search committees
- School improvement planning teams

(Adapted from New Mexico Toolkit)

As you think about your school's various organizations, determine if the school population as a whole is well-represented. Do families have knowledge of and understand the different opportunities available for their participation? Consider holding an "Involvement Awareness" get-together in conjunction with a student-centered event to provide information and solicit greater participation.

What other ways can you find for parents and families to become more involved in advocacy and decision making at your school and within your district?

Collaboration

"When schools develop and implement strategies for promoting effective school-family-community partnerships, the result is improved learning for all students and strengthened schools, families and communities."

(Caplan, 1998)

Once you have strengthened communication and involvement, educated the public about your school goals and programs, and increased participatory decision-making, support for your plans and efforts will be more present. Collaboration with parents and the larger community can provide meaningful ways to connect students to out-of-school educational experiences and opportunities.

Understanding Partnerships

- Encourage and support teachers as they:
  - Seek and initiate
  - Plan and develop
  - Implement and manage community partnerships

    (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005)

- http://www.cesdp.nmhu.edu/toolkit/collaborating-with-the-community/understanding-partnerships.asp

As pointed out by Hoover-Dempsey and colleagues, many teachers have not been given training in how to develop community partnerships. It is therefore important that leadership is provided to support individual teacher's efforts as well as schoolwide plans. This handout titled "Collaborating with the Community – Understanding Partnerships" can be used to determine the level of partnership your school is at in working with the community. Based on your responses, add new goals to your existing plan. These materials are linked to Practice Activity #5.

http://www.cesdp.nmhu.edu/toolkit/collaborating-with-the-community/understanding-partnerships.asp

Community Involvement

- Provide updates on student progress toward meeting reading goals to:
    - Convey importance of learning to read proficiently
    - Increase support, advocacy and volunteerism
    - Show how the whole community benefits from academically successful students

To keep the focus on student achievement, it's critical to provide updates on student progress toward meeting the goals set in your School Reading Plan. The more informed the community is, the more likely they are to be advocates and involved in education.

Community Involvement

- Offer a range of opportunities to appeal to interests and accommodate a variety of schedules

- http://www.cesdp.nmhu.edu/toolkit/collaborating-with-the-community/collaborating-community-questions.asp

- http://www.cesdp.nmhu.edu/toolkit/collaborating-with-the-community/community-involvement.asp

These links will take you to the New Mexico Toolkit module on Collaborating with the Community. "Three Critical Questions" is another valuable tool to guide your school's discussion about community involvement and assist with developing a plan to strengthen these connections. "Guidelines for Working with Community Partners" can help to generate ideas for activities and ways community organizations can provide support to schools. These materials are linked to Practice Activity #6.

http://www.cesdp.nmhu.edu/toolkit/collaborating-with-the-community/collaborating-community-questions.asp
http://www.cesdp.nmhu.edu/toolkit/collaborating-with-the-community/community-involvement.asp

Additional Activities

- **<u>Practice Activities :</u>**
- #7: How could instruction benefit from greater parent or community involvement?
- #8: Take action!
- #9: Preparing to engage parents
- #10: Preparing to engage the greater community

You may find these 4 additional Practice Activities helpful in planning for effective parent and community involvement in your school or classroom. They can be used to stimulate conversation about how instruction could benefit from increased volunteerism and collaboration with parents and the larger community.

Student-Centered Community Events

- Provide a forum:
  - to showcase students' skills and talents
  - for informal interactions and distributing information to a range of community members
  - to highlight expectations for greater involvement and specific needs
  - for community members to show interest and support in informal ways

As suggested earlier in this presentation, student-centered community events provide a meaningful forum to highlight students' skills and talents. They can be smaller, specialized showcases or larger events designed to attract a broader population. In either case, they provide opportunities for getting information out to the public and for the community members to show their interest and support for students and learning.

The term "Community" includes all who are interested in and affected by the quality of education, not just families with children. Service projects such as organizing a used book sale and using the proceeds to purchase new books for the library, recycling events and neighborhood clean-ups allow students to work to solve local problems and feel valued. Projects such as coaching and tutoring, music, art and drama events, serve to build student confidence and share talents. Involving and engaging families and the community is a complex process, but one worthy of the school's efforts. When the public feels welcome and valued at your school, is informed about school goals and student progress, sees ways to be involved and participate, a stronger collaboration focused on student achievement will ensue.

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