

School: **WHITEHORSE MIDDLE SCHOOL**
Date: **October 2006**

**MADISON METROPOLITAN SCHOOL DISTRICT
A FAMILY & COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT PLAN FOR YOUR BUILDING**

Attached is a survey/checklist of approaches for engaging families and the community in your school. The majority of the items are appropriate for all families. Additional items for families of students with disabilities have been included based on information obtained from a Special Education Parent Survey completed the spring of 2004, along with input from the Parent Advisory Council and the Special Education Coordinators. Completing this checklist should give you information about the strengths and needs in your building for parent/family involvement and should help you create a goal for your School Improvement Plan. In the future, this tool will be incorporated into the SIP year I process. In addition to meeting the needs of your families, completing this process will support compliance of NCLB (Section III 8) for your school.

Directions:

As you complete this checklist, ask yourself how you know if an approach is in place and whether or not it functions at all grade levels. There is also space to note projects or activities that you offer that may not be on the list. Enter these under the appropriate area heading.

Every building is unique, so you will select approaches to meet your needs. Your school should, however, implement activities in each of the main areas of:

- **Making School Welcoming To All**
- **Communicating**
- **Parenting, Decision-Making/Building Leadership and Governance**
- **Volunteering**
- **Helping Your Student Do Well In School (learning at home)**
- **Collaborating With the Community.**

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MAKING SCHOOL WELCOMING TO ALL

Remember that students come from a wide variety of family structures, cultures, and configurations. Schools should support and encourage the involvement of all families and assure that non-traditional and non-majority households are welcomed. Use inclusive language any time that families are a focus.

Does your school? (Check all that apply)

- Make oral interpretation services available for non-English speaking families when appropriate and feasible. Translate written materials sent to families. Respect all languages as acceptable.
- Display pictures (photos, posters, etc.) in the school, reflecting diverse students/families. Convey a high level of quality learning in all display materials.
- Complete a "walk through" of your school experimenting with how it might feel if you were from a particular culture or family configuration. Ask yourself, as a member of _____ (family configuration/status/race/etc), would I feel welcome? If no, what needs to change to create that welcome?
- Involve families in developing the physical space of the school, such as creating hallway displays, choices of art or posters.
- Offer a new family welcome process. As a part of the welcome, include information about the school and related community resources.
- Create a display of photos of staff and their names, so that families can familiarize themselves with who the staff is and the role they play in the school.
- Assure that front office staff conveys a welcoming attitude, treating everyone with full respect.
- Create ways for families to meet together, especially if they are from minority language or minority status groups.
- Assure that your family teacher organization welcomes all parent/families and has representation on the board reflective of the school population.
- Celebrate (or refrain from celebrating) multiple holidays that recognize all backgrounds.
- Become a part of your school community. Attend community events. Reach out.
- Keep in mind barriers to families' participation and assist in removing these where possible. For example, explore needs for transportation, childcare.

Division of Special Education:

- Create a welcoming environment at IEP meetings for families.
- Coordinate a family-family support network for families of students with disabilities who are new to the school or new to the Division of Special Education.
- Other: _____

COMMUNICATING

Create opportunities for staff and families to communicate about school programs and student progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communication. Promote systems for communication between families.

Perhaps the most important aspect of communicating with families is that it is done in the spirit of equal sharing. Family/guardian contacts should be frequent, flexible, and collegial. As staff, we may be involved with a student for a few years, but the family has a lifetime commitment to that child.

Does your school? (Check all that apply)

- Train staff about the importance and types of family involvement and provide information about how to team effectively with families.
- Provide oral interpretation services for all school/home communication and written translation of documents when appropriate and feasible and respect all languages as acceptable.
- Provide a family directory. Families who chose to be included can access addresses and phone numbers of one another. Also share with families a staff directory that lists phone numbers, emails and best ways to contact staff.
- Ask parent/families the best way to communicate with them and follow their suggestions. Is email an option?
- Provide orientation sessions for families. Hold an introduction for families to share information about school year events. Take time to meet with parent/ families before the school year begins. Allow for meetings in local community centers if applicable.
- Designate a family resource area the building. This might be a family bulletin board (where information of particular interest to them is posted) or a family resource area (often in library) where materials of interest to all families can be found.
- Begin the school year communicating with families on a positive note understanding the six types of involvement and communicating.
- Create informal times that bring together teachers and families to socialize and provide interpreters if necessary. Family events serve to strengthen school community ties.
- Communicate the school's mission as well as school's expectation for families. Include information about school's discipline policies as well as about academics.
- Share information about homework support and community resources.
- Help families understand grade level expectations and curriculum, by providing written curriculum guides. Find other ways to share this information in interesting ways.
- Use student projects to involve families. Performances and displays of student work bring in proud families.
- Use and expand Student Handbooks.
- Publish newsletters. (Include newsletters published by students, news about particular content areas, "regular "building -wide" newsletters, and/or grade/class level newsletters). Share "good news" about students and programs whenever possible
- Establish a building level web site and keep it up to date.
- Express appreciation of families. (For example, award certificates of appreciation at conference time.)
- Schedule frequent conference times so that families and teachers have an easy venue for contact.

- Assure that families who have inflexible or unusual work schedules are accommodated in family teacher conferences and other meetings.
- Speak directly to families if students are having an academic or behavioral difficulty before a crisis occurs.
- When a student problem arises initiate a problem solving team involving family/ teachers and the student.
- Keep a communication log to note your discussions with families.
- Provide families with ways to comment & give feedback on the school's communication.

Division of Special Education:

- Provide families with contact information of the staff members on their child's IEP team.
- Provide families with the opportunity to ask questions and share their experiences related to the IEP process.
- Other _____

PARENTING

Build on family strengths by assisting with resources about family and child-rearing skills, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions that support students. Assist school staff in understanding and working cooperatively with families.

Does your school? (Check all that apply)

- Connect families with information and with support groups. One of the most helpful approaches for families can be connecting them with one another. Survey families to identify their specific needs. Support families in completing surveys if needed.
- Hold workshops about general topics of interest to families, which THEY have identified: effective family techniques, adolescent development, building student resiliency and assets, and information about the families' role in student achievement. Have families choose the most convenient session times. Respond with resources when families ask for information. Have families choose times for these workshops.
- Link families to resources by connecting them with support staff, and with community resources.
- Assure that family programs provide information based on the culture and life experiences of your school's family populations. Provide groups for populations that might have specific needs.
- Provide families with information that helps develop home conditions that support learning at school.
- Create opportunities for the whole family to participate at school.
- Provide special family programs that have been shown to be effective (research based).
- Co-host programs with community partners. (Examples such as F.A.S.T. program, Family Haven, Schools of Success).

Division of Special Education

- Provide a list of resources/contacts at your school, within the district, and in the community that provide services to students with disabilities and their families.
- Other _____

DECISION-MAKING/BUILDING LEADERSHIP & GOVERNANCE

As a true partnership, education includes families as active forces in school decisions, governance and advocacy.

Does your school? (Check all that apply)

- Provide information, training, and mentoring for families about taking leadership roles and inviting families personally to the opportunities.
- Include family roles in the school's governance and/or committee structure. Whose words and ideas are listened to with most attention and respect? Who is in authority and who has credibility?
- Support PTO or other school family groups by designating staff who will regularly attend family organization meetings.
- When hiring substitutes, give thought to prioritizing local community members.
- Include families on SIP committees.

Division of Special Education

- Support participation of families of students with disabilities in PTO sponsored events (e.g., offer child care for students with disabilities).
- Other

VOLUNTEERING

To ensure a smooth functioning volunteer program, a staff person must have time allocated to check in the volunteers and to be accountable. Strive to improve recruitment, training, and options for volunteering. Provide volunteer opportunities that fit family schedules. Provide a range of volunteer roles.

Does your school? (Check all that apply)

- Assign staff person to coordinate the volunteer program. Provide resource packets and training (including information on confidentiality) for volunteers.
- Vary opportunities for volunteering. Some roles might be one time only while others are ongoing. The kind of work available for volunteers should require a range of skills.
- Offer Youth Service Learning opportunities for students. (This goes beyond typical community service by involving students in meaningful community work connected to curriculum). Families can participate in service with their students.
- Ask family members how they would like to participate as volunteers and respond to them in a timely manner when they assist.
- Establish a building-wide goal to have every family involved in some way every year.
- See families as resources. Survey families' knowledge and skills. Bring them into classes to share these skills and roles. Notify families/ community of content areas to be covered in the classroom and invite them to volunteer their expertise in specific areas. Use volunteers for specific areas, such as assistants in PE, art, music and other areas where extra hands are needed.
- Ask families to volunteer for general building roles. Some examples include homeroom family, hallway greeter, and lunchroom or playground assistants.
- Provide volunteer recognition.
- Monitor the level and frequency of family and community participation in school programs.
- Offer volunteer opportunities for working and single families.
- Encourage family members to be involved as:
 - class presenters
 - chaperones
 - special events staff
 - classroom assistants
 - participants in site based management
 - non-instructional assistants
 - tutors/mentor
 - other _____

HELPING YOUR STUDENT DO WELL IN SCHOOL (learning at home)

Create ways for families and staff to work together in developing learning goals and offering opportunities for learning activities at home. Provide information for families about how to help with homework. Remember that families have differing amounts of time as well as levels of ability to participate in their students' learning. They may be intimidated by school related information, especially in curricular areas where they do not feel competent to assist their child. Other commitments in life may limit available time for a family's direct involvement in learning at home. All families, however, can participate in supporting student learning. Information sharing sessions need to be high interest and highly interactive. One example is having students set up a learning activity (about a curricular area) for their families.

Help families learn to have the long view for their student. Help them find resources to guide their students in planning for higher education.

Does your school? (Check all that apply)

- Encourage students to discuss and interact with their families about what they are learning in class by giving interactive homework. This will also allow family members to contribute their knowledge to student learning. (Provide a way that a student with families who are unable to participate can use other adult supports for these lessons).
- Help families understand school systems. Some families need in depth information on specific school related areas such as: special education definitions, process, and eligibility; autism or other mental health information; information for ESL students/families; gifted and talented information, and so on. Students can assist in developing or compiling materials about these areas. Do not use jargon or initials.
- Offer learning activities and events for the whole family.
- Collaborate with families in goal setting sessions for students.
- Make information available to families about student resources, such as after school sessions, homework help, tutoring, and summer resources.
- Share curriculum information with families in an engaging way.
- Connect families to after school homework resources.
- Provide incentives for families, and for students whose families attend informational sessions.
- Link families with community resources and activities that promote learning.
- Give guardians/families ways to evaluate their child's progress. Ask them provide feedback to teachers.
- Conduct project related events for families. (Some examples: Family literacy projects– families and students meet to read and tell stories in their home language, also provide read aloud projects; Family projects fair – family chooses project, hobby, skill to develop and bring to school to share with others., Family sports night; Students lead events for families – e.g. Technology basics, (like “how to program your VCR”); Family interviews – families/kids interview each other about school experiences, and heritage.)

Division of Special Education

- Provide families of students with disabilities with specific strategies that are being utilized by staff to help their child be successful at school.
- Help families understand the IEP process and their legal rights during the process.

COLLABORATING WITH THE COMMUNITY

The school community reaches beyond the student, school, and family. Outside supports provide needed resources to families. Schools can help coordinate resources and services with businesses, agencies, and other groups that provide services. Establish partnerships with individuals and organizations in the community.

Does your school? (Check all that apply)

- Act as a source of information and referral about services available in the community for families.
- Use variety in the ways we reach out to adults, families and children. Consciously reach out to families of all ages, races, languages and economic backgrounds.
- Encourage local civic and service groups to become involved in the school.
- Bring helpful community programming to the school, both for enrichment and for support. Some examples include FAST, FACE, Boys and Girls Clubs, immunization clinics, etc.
- Provide students with meaningful service to the community (such as Youth Service Learning programs). We need to view students as assets in our communities.
- Celebrate the diversity of the student population with food, dance and music from the community by holding culture fairs/ international days and family heritage days. Families should participate as planners. Deepen this experience by tying events to the curriculum.
- Expand the content of workshops for families. Families' interests go beyond family issues.
- Hold art exhibitions and involve artists in residence.
- Work with the local faith communities (be inclusive of various communities and sensitive to those who do not have religious affiliation). Faith communities can provide resources and support.
- Create a place within the school where adults in the family can come to learn and/or can come to learn with their students.
- Involve groups that provide mentoring for both male and female students.
- Give off site (local community) tours for school staff. Students can learn about the community by visiting workplaces outside of the school building.
- Invite in community leaders to share with families.
- Offer grandparents/foster family days at school.
- Other _____