

# School-initiated Family and Community Partnerships

*This We Believe: Successful Schools for Young Adolescents*



Schools do not presume to educate children alone. In today's society, genuine family and community involvement are fundamental components of successful schools for young adolescents. Too many parents mistakenly become less involved in middle school, believing that their children need less support at this level. Continuing parental involvement is as important as ever, so schools must take the initiative to develop needed home-school bonds. Frequently parents are uncertain about how they can be involved in this new and often larger school. They may also be unsure about the most appropriate way to deal with their rapidly changing and maturing child but are hesitant to seek assistance.

Research studies clearly link the involvement of both family and other adults in the community with higher levels of student achievement, improved student behavior, and greater overall support for schools. Successful middle level schools, therefore, promote family involvement by sponsoring parent education programs, creating and maintaining links between home and school, initiating volunteer programs, establishing coordinated home-school learning experiences, and developing activities that involve community businesses and various cultural and civic groups.

Principals and faculty members in these schools use a variety of ways to reach out to families in partnership including meeting in community centers or local housing projects, using language interpreters, or setting up a school "Family Learning Center" where parents can obtain information, have materials translated, or meet with school officials and other parents. The traditional practices of school newsletters, report cards, and parent-teacher conferences have been joined and enhanced by e-mail, Web sites, student-led conferences, and homework hotlines as valuable communication tools to inform and involve parents and community members.

Middle level schools also seek appropriate partnerships with businesses, social service agencies, and other organizations whose purposes are consistent with the school's mission. Students become involved in apprenticeships, shadow studies, service learning projects, and activities that use the community as a learning site. Community members and school partners can provide considerable assistance and expertise in the school's instructional program as well.

In any partnership or venture, all parties must benefit and share mutually understood roles and expectations. The school-family-community relationship is no different. Schools should expect families and community to take advantage of opportunities provided to support student learning. Further, families should spend time engaged in their children's learning, thus demonstrating belief in the importance of school success. When collaborating with families, educators must be sensitive to local and cultural considerations.

---

## Original publication information:

National Middle School Association. (2003). *School-initiated family and community partnerships*. In *This We Believe: Successful Schools for Young Adolescents* (pp. 17-19), Westerville, OH: Author.