

Programs to Engage Parents and Other Family Members

SNAPSHOT

Program:

Revitalizing the Title I School-Parent Compact

School: Geraldine W. Johnson Elementary-Middle School

District: Bridgeport, Conn.

Grades: K-12

Enrollment: 840

Free/reduced-price lunch: 100%

ELL: 42%

Linking the school-parent compact to school improvement goals

Revitalizing the Title I School-Parent Compact

Geraldine W. Johnson Elementary-Middle School

Bridgeport, Connecticut

When Johnson Elementary-Middle School opened as a new school in 2008, Principal Marlene Roberts wanted the School-Parent Compact mandated under Title I to play a vital role in the school community. That same year, the Connecticut Department of Education announced a program to refresh school-parent compacts. Roberts seized the opportunity to link her school's compact to school improvement goals and engage families in ways that would truly help students succeed.

Now teachers and families are collaborating to bring students' academic skills to grade level. In fact, the effort involves the whole school community, including classroom teachers, the School Leadership Team, and the parent organization. Each grade level has its own compact for achieving Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

According to Roberts, "We found that parents want to know how to help. They ask: 'What is our role to prepare our kids for college? How can we be involved in middle school?' Now teachers are making themselves available to confer with parents, and our families are becoming more engaged each year."



How the program works

Teachers meet about twice a month for 30 minutes in grade-level "data" teams to discuss how students are doing. At the beginning of the school year, each team identifies two or three skills on which to focus and develops strategies that families can use to promote learning at home. Based on those conversations, teachers design workshops and home-based learning activities, such as questions to ask while watching a movie or ideas for using math at the grocery store. The workshops and activities become part of a written school-parent compact in which teachers and families agree to collaborate.

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"The compact ties things together and brings us closer," says Nicole FitzSimmons, a sixth-grade teacher. She finds that the math workshops refresh parents' skills in solving equations and other areas of sixth-grade math. "It's fun, not stressful," she adds.

Evidence of effectiveness

- ▶ Student performance at Johnson remains uneven, but scores for students in third, sixth, and eighth grades are improving. In 2011-2012, the focus will be on reading. According to Assistant Principal Deborah Tisdale, some of the youngest teachers have been particularly active in the program. "Our new teachers are energetic and enthusiastic, and they have led the effort, although all teachers are more willing to open their doors to parents and to help each other by working as a team," she says. "Teachers are spending more time with students after school to help them with homework, and parent involvement is increasing each year."
- ▶ Data from the Connecticut State Department of Education show that the quality of compacts at Geraldine Johnson has improved dramatically, according to Judy Carson, the director of the state's School-Family-Community Partnerships Project. On a rigorous rating scale designed by Carson, the school's compact has jumped from a rating of 10 to 18 on a 20-point scale. Because the school is new, long-term student achievement data are not yet available.

Exemplary practices

Linking to data: Grade-level teams steadily track student progress and identify areas where students' skills need strengthening. Thanks to the communications process set up through the compact, parents receive information regularly from teachers, and they use it

to work with their children at home. Teachers offer workshops and family learning activities tied to improving student performance in key skill areas.

Personally inviting families to participate: The Johnson school community and the United Way created a phone squad to call families and offer personal invitations to the workshops. Workshops begin at 5:30 p.m., immediately following the Lighthouse afterschool program. Parents are recruited at the door, and participating families receive a pizza dinner and a basket of five books.

Building on existing practice: Teachers' data team meetings take place about twice a month while the students are at a special class. Teachers also have planning time scheduled twice a month. The time that teachers spend developing compacts is coupled with meetings that are already on the schedule and in the teacher contract.

Outlook

Title I law says that each school must have a School-Parent Compact that describes how teachers and families will work to improve student learning. The Bridgeport school district now requires all schools to revamp their compacts and link them to the school improvement plan. In addition, the district offers technical assistance and support to help schools develop and carry out high quality compacts. The Connecticut State Department of Education is so pleased with the success of Geraldine W. Johnson Elementary-Middle School and the other 15 schools in the state pilot program that it plans to offer training and technical assistance on revitalizing School-Parent Compacts to all schools in the state, starting in the 2011-2012 school year.

Family-School-Community Partnerships 2.0

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Association perspective

As Bridgeport Education Association President Gary Peluchette puts it: "I applaud the efforts our members are making to establish school-family partnerships through the Title I School-Parent Compact. We all realize that this type of collaboration is a key component in our students' success."

Local contact

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