The Case for
Parent Leadership

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It's Time

When people are asked what parent involvement means, they most likely imagine an elementary school and young children. Then they think of helping with homework, going to parent-teacher conferences, volunteering in the classroom or playground, and attending PTA meetings. The purpose of this report is to argue for something more — a lot more.

Based on our experience with the Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership in Kentucky and similar efforts around the country, we contend that parents must become equal partners in education. The people who work in our public schools should feel responsible not just to their colleagues and the district staff who supervise them, but to the parents whose children they teach. And parents should feel responsible for doing all they can to support their children, reach out to other parents and work with the schools to improve student achievement.

Studies of school reform identify the critical need for leadership and professional development — for administrators and teachers. We contend that parents should have the opportunity for leadership development, too. We believe that our case is vital to everyone who is interested in public education — parents, teachers, students, grandparents, businesspeople and members of communities across our country.

- The standards-based reform movement has introduced accountability to public education. Not only does our nation accept that all children can learn, most at high levels, but we also are committed to making that happen by 2014. Between now and then, all public schools must make adequate progress toward that goal every year or face stiff consequences.

- There is no way that this will happen, that all children will become proficient in reading, science and math over the next 10 years, without a major increase in parent involvement.

- Thirty years of research studies show that when parents are engaged in their children's learning, their children do better in school — and the schools get better. School improvement programs must take this research into account.

- New studies suggest that organized parent leadership is having a major impact. When parents have information, skills and organizational support, they can demand — and are getting — upgraded facilities, improved school leadership and staffing, new resources to improve teaching, higher-quality learning programs, funding for after-school programs, and more choices. These are essential supports for improved achievement.

Some people might say that a leadership role is just for the "outspoken few" or that most parents would not "be comfortable" making decisions about education. We've found that while not all parents want to take the lead, many parents do, far more than we first expected. Parents do not have to be experts in curriculum, assessment or child

development to ask good questions of people who are. Parents can look at school test data and find achievement gaps. They can ask what the school is doing to improve student progress and whether there is evidence that the program is working. They can ask what their choices are and whether children in their school are eligible for high-quality tutoring and other extra help. And they can ask how parents, individually and together, can help to improve student achievement.

Furthermore, parent leaders can reach out to other parents in ways that schools cannot. They can, for example, organize a science expo and get a big turnout, facilitate parent-teacher dialogues, connect to parents who don't speak English, and recruit volunteers for after-school programs. Parent leaders can also tap their contacts in the community. They can approach community groups and businesses for help, lobby the mayor to restore funding cuts, do action research on school safety, and write proposals to get funding for new projects.

Parents need information, support and assistance to play their part in the new accountability system. Not only are they supposed to help their children at home, but they also are supposed to be smart consumers and take action if their schools don't perform. Investing in parent leaders will help schools improve, strengthen our communities and send children a clear message that we expect great things from them.

We hope you agree.

How To Use This Report

The Case for Parent Leadership includes five chapters and a resource section that look at how parent leadership has grown as a nationwide movement, how it works in various cities and schools and how you can use it to improve your own school. Scattered throughout are tools and checklists that you can use to assess the current state of parent involvement at your school.

Start by reading this report to see if our discussion and examples persuade you that parent leadership is an essential component of school improvement. Use the tools and checklists to assess your school's position toward families and the attitudes of its leaders (both teachers and parents).

Talk to leaders in your community about what they think is needed. Be sure to include people who represent the diversity of families in your school, by race, income and ethnic group. If you find it helpful, use the talking points in this introduction and examples from the report or from your community.

Consider the advice in the last chapter, "Rising to the Challenge: Are Schools Ready for Parent Leaders?" If you're a principal or an administrator, check the expectations for effective school leaders. If you're a parent or community member thinking about stepping forward, consider what's expected of you.

Explore the publications and Web sites in the resource guide. Find out what's available in your district and state to support parent leadership development. Identify some potential sources of funding and other support.

Look at data from your own school and district. What do student test results and school report cards tell you about the achievement problems in your community? Are there achievement gaps among different groups of students? Does high poverty predict low achievement? Is attendance low? Are most teachers qualified to teach the classes to which they've been assigned? What do you think are the most important problems? Ask yourself: Can these problems be addressed effectively without the knowledge and support of parents, families and community members?

If you believe that parents can — and should — be an important part of the solution, it could very well be time for parent leadership in your community.

Chapter 1. A New Vision of Parent Involvement: Parents Taking the Lead

Public schools are under pressure as never before. Federal law requires states to set standards that all students must meet and to assess student progress each year. Test results are published in the newspapers and sent home to parents in school report cards. If schools fail to make "adequate yearly progress" in improving student scores for two years in a row, they are publicly identified as "in need of improvement."

If schools "in need of improvement" receive federal Title I funds, parents may request that their children be transferred to another school. Schools that continue to fail may be taken over by the district or state, or they may be handed over to a private contractor to manage. In addition, schools in many districts face stiff competition from charter schools, magnet programs, and private and parochial schools. All of this is playing out in an era of shrinking state and local revenues.

Consider this situation from a parent's point of view. Parents face a bewildering array of options. For the first time, they have ready access to data about how well (or poorly) their children's schools are performing. Should they keep their child in a school where student progress is lagging, even if their child is doing well? Should they try another school that is farther away and perhaps not much better? Should they explore options like charter schools or vouchers? Or should they pitch in and help their child's school get better?

Parents' decisions may well hinge on whether they believe they can have an impact on the schools their children currently attend. Are they treated with respect at the school? Can they work as a partner with their children's teachers? Are they included in making important decisions? Does the school respond to their concerns?

If parents feel locked out of the school's decision-making process and have limited contact with teachers and principals, they may well wonder what they can do to improve the school's curriculum, culture or practices. And parents in many places do feel excluded. Sometimes they even are blamed for their children's performance.

According to a 2003 Gallup poll, three-quarters of parents say they would stay in their current school if it were "in need of improvement" — at least for now. When some districts, like New York City and Philadelphia, proposed bringing in private companies to manage local schools, parents hit the streets with picket signs. In Washington, DC, where a proposed voucher plan would give families funds to pay private school tuition, scores of parents have turned out to demonstrate their opposition.

Schools need these parents. There is no way that schools can do the daunting job of improving chronic low achievement by themselves. Now, more than ever, there is a compelling need for parents to be powerfully engaged as advocates of improved public education for all children. Just as expectations for teachers and students have been raised by higher academic standards, accountability and testing, so have expectations been raised for parents. This imperative is backed by 30 years of research. When parents are

actively engaged, not just at home, but as advocates and decision-makers at schools and in the community, their children do better in school, and the schools get better.

In his book, *Is There a Public for the Public Schools?*, David Mathews said, "The public is halfway out the schoolhouse door." But it is not too late to bring them back. The first step is to recognize that parents belong in the schools and that, in fact, the schools belong to them.

Around the country, parents are rising to this challenge. They are choosing a more active alternative than just bailing out. They are taking the lead in identifying problems and partnering with schools to create solutions. This new approach is called *parent leadership*. It is changing the way parents and schools interact in districts large and small, urban, rural and suburban.

Consider, for example, what parent leaders have accomplished in Kentucky. In downtown Louisville, Holly Holland and Terry Black believed that sixth graders entering Noe Middle School would perform better if they had some help adjusting to their new learning environment. Using seed money they raised themselves, the parents worked with the school's Youth Services Center, principal Kathy Sayre, other parents and teachers to develop a Transition Night. The first event drew more than 100 parents with workshops on adolescent development, academic standards and school safety and with reports by lead teachers on the school's team organization and concept. Today, Noe Middle School sponsors a Transition Night for each grade and is tying the transition concept to other initiatives, like the federal GEAR-UP program. (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs, or GEAR-UP, is a program to help low-income students continue education after high school.) PTA membership has doubled and many more parents are active in the school. Students report that they like having parents in the building — and that they feel safer.

Across the state in Paducah, Donna Chu didn't know how to help her ninth grader at Lone Oak High complete her Individual Graduation Plan. What courses should her daughter be taking? What did colleges expect? Checking with other parents, Chu found that they had questions, too. Many, however, felt uncomfortable approaching the school for answers, and the school counselors were busy working with seniors. Taking the initiative, Chu and her friend Brenda Murphy put together a multigrade college application resource that included a 30-page college planning guide mailed to every student's home. They also organized a workshop for 11th graders with speakers representing a range of postsecondary education options and the military; a regular student-written column in the school newspaper on applying to college; and a bookcase of college catalogs and other information.

And in a working-class, suburban area of Jefferson County, a group of parents asked principal Steve St. Clair what they could do to help improve achievement at low-performing Conway Middle School. The principal encouraged the group to take on one of his pet projects: student-led parent conferences. Their successful effort marked the start of a parent-school partnership that has benefited students in many ways. Today, parent-

teacher school association (PTSA) membership has doubled, and a parent board addresses substantive issues including curriculum, assessment scheduling and quality student work. At open houses, parents run information booths on topics of interest like writing portfolios, youth service centers, student-led conferences, and opportunities to get involved in PTSA and school councils. Test scores improved. Thanks to its gains, the school has received a cash award from the state.

Who are these parents, and where did they come from? In each of these examples, the parents had an important advantage. They all received training in effective school partnership skills from the Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership (CIPL), a statewide program in Kentucky run by the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence. To date, more than 1,100 parents have graduated from the institute — a small army of activists informed about how a standards-based education system works and how to make it work for their children.

Efforts to develop parent leaders and promote school achievement are under way in other cities and states as well. In Boston, the Parent Leadership Exchange (PLE), part of the Institute for Responsive Education, works with parent leaders in three New England states. PLE intends to foster school, family and community partnerships that improve student outcomes; expand networking opportunities; and build leadership skills. To meet the professional development needs of parent leaders in schools and community organizations, PLE offers networking opportunities through conferences, newsletters, a Web site and a forum for sharing best practices. PLE also provides technical assistance and training on critical issues.

The Connecticut Commission on Families offers a Parent Leadership Training Institute "to help parents become the leaders they would like to be for children and families." The goals of the institute are to:

- expand the capacity of parents as change agents for children and families;
- develop communities of parents within regions of the state who will support one another to develop skills and take successful action for children;
- bring about systems change so that parents increasingly are engaged in policy and process decisions; and
- increase parent-child interactions and improve child outcomes through parent involvement.

Most parent leaders probably think of themselves as typical moms and dads. Most possess no high-level political connections, advanced degrees or surplus leisure time. In fact, many dedicated leaders work hard to raise their families in single-parent homes or low-income neighborhoods. Many would say that they had no intention of becoming leaders at all — they simply saw a need and responded to it.

About CIPL

Kentucky's Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership (CIPL) was created by the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, a statewide citizen organization whose goal is to improve education for all citizens in the state.

When the state Legislature passed the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) in 1990, it was the most far-reaching standards-based reform law in the nation. The Prichard Committee created CIPL to explain KERA and support its implementation by training parents and community members to understand what is needed to educate all children to high standards and to help schools get there.

CIPL fellows attend three two-day sessions, offered at sites around the state, about six weeks apart. Each participant agrees to design and complete a project aimed at engaging other parents to improve student achievement. Many go on to become officers of parent-teacher organizations, win election to school councils and run for school boards.

The Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence began in 1980 as a state-appointed task force charged with recommending how to improve higher education. During its work, the committee learned that progress must occur at all levels of education. In 1983, the committee incorporated as a private, nonprofit group and turned its attention to improving elementary and secondary education. For more information, go to www.prichardcommittee.org and www.cipl.org.

What these parent leaders do have is a strong sense of the value of education. They are determined to obtain the best possible schools for their children and their communities. They have the vision to see what can be done, and they are willing to learn the skills to get where they want to go.

Often, parent leaders are motivated by conditions in low-performing schools in districts where school bureaucracies tend to keep parents at arm's length. Yet, as we have seen in the Kentucky examples, parent leaders can — and do — bring their skills to bear in a range of settings. They address issues that head the agendas of school reformers, politicians and policymakers, educators, and parents.

Approaches to Parent Leadership

This emerging vision of parents as leaders contrasts sharply with the usual forms of parent involvement, which often are deeply rooted in local tradition. Let's call this the standard model. Typically, parents join the PTA; help to raise funds for the annual class trip or marching band; attend plays and sporting events; and volunteer in the lunchroom,

playground or classroom. In standard-model schools, parents usually expect to fight for their own children's success. They often feel little sense of responsibility, however, when other students, or groups of students, struggle or fail. They believe it is the schools' job to take care of that problem.

In the standard model, most principals, teachers and staff see themselves as highly trained and committed professionals who are doing an important job, often under difficult circumstances. They are responsible for the safety of the building and the integrity of the work that goes on there. Consequently, they are wary of who they let into their school and who they will involve in the classroom. From parent-teacher conferences to opening school facilities, school staff tend to feel that it is their job to establish the terms of parent involvement — and that parents should defer to their authority. Yet when schools perform below acceptable levels, educators are likely to blame parents for not being involved or for poorly preparing their children.

In contrast, in the parent leadership model, parent leaders hold schools accountable for results, rather than accepting the blame for low student achievement. But parent leaders believe that they, too, should share responsibility for improvement.

Within the parent leadership model, different approaches have evolved throughout the country, based in large part on how willing schools and districts have been to engage parents in the process of school improvement.

- **Parents as partners —** Programs like CIPL in Kentucky and PLE in New England are based on the concept of parents as partners with educators. The goal is to equip parents with skills and contacts to engage other parents; connect schools with community groups; identify and engage resources for schools; and collaborate with administrators, teachers and other school staff. The partnership approach works best in schools and districts where administrators and teachers are open to collaboration with parents.

- **Parent advocacy —** Organizations like Parents United for Responsible Education (PURE) in Chicago, Advocates for Children in New York City and the New Jersey Education Law Center provide training and technical support to parent organizations and parents on school councils. Parent advocacy groups also may take legal action, such as to remedy unfair funding formulas or require open meetings. Some assist parents in disputes with schools. This approach recognizes partnership as a goal, but has evolved in districts and schools where there is resistance to collaboration.

- **Parent and community organizing —** In this approach, parents organize to hold schools accountable through the democratic political process. Groups like the Boston Parent Organizing Network (BPON), Mothers on the Move (MOM) in the Bronx and the Logan Square Neighborhood Association in Chicago use direct action, such as demonstrations, media events and public meetings with office holders and candidates, to make their point. Parent organizers also build constituencies among other parents or join forces with existing community groups and religious organizations. This

approach often is used in poor-performing, low-income communities where schools and districts are run by closed, highly defensive bureaucracies.

Is Your School Open to Partnership with Parents?

While many schools reach out to today's parent leaders, others still cling to attitudes and practices that restrict parents to more limited traditional roles. Use this self-assessment to see where your school falls on the path from Fortress to Partnership. Under each question, circle the letter beside the statement that seems to describe your school.

1. What is your school's attitude toward families?

a. Parents belong at home, not at school. If students don't do well, it's because their families don't give them enough support.
b. Parents are welcome when asked. There's only so much they can do.
c. Parents can be involved at school in a number of ways. It tries to make contact with all of them at least once a year.
d. Our school sets high standards for all students and families. It partners with families to make sure every single student succeeds.

2. Does the school give families information about standards and the curriculum?

a. Parents don't need to know much about this, and they probably won't understand it anyway.
b. Parents get information about what students will be learning at the fall open house.
c. Teachers send home folders of student work.
d. Families help assess student portfolios, using scoring guides. They also attend regular exhibits of student work, where students explain how it meets standards.

3. Can parents and family members easily see the principal and visit classrooms?

a. Families should not bother the school staff. Visiting the classroom would distract the children. Besides, parents will need security clearances before they are allowed in.
b. The school calls families if their children are having problems. Families can visit on report card pickup day.
c. The school has several family events every year. Parents talk to classes about their jobs and hobbies and help out as tutors.
d. Parents are involved in all aspects of the school. They can attend staff training, and the principal has regular hours each week to meet with families. Every school committee has active parent members.

4. Does the school have an active parent group, such as a PTA or Parent Association?

a. The principal has picked a small group of parents to help out.
b. The active parents are mostly middle class. The others don't come or contribute.
c. The parent group sets its own agenda and raises money for the school. They also write the school handbook.

d. Families decide how they want to be involved. They reach out to make sure all families take part in some way. Parents can use the phone, copier, fax and computers. The family center is always full of parents.

5. Does the school openly discuss tough issues, like achievement gaps, racism and bullying?

a. The problems at our school are dealt with by its professional staff.
b. The principal sets the agenda for discussions at staff meetings. Sometimes a few parents are invited.
c. The school gives progress reports to parents, but the test data are hard to understand.
d. Parents and teachers have study groups and do action research on issues like prejudice and tracking. Families are part of all major decisions.

Where Does Your School Fall?

Count the number of times you checked each letter. Multiply the times you used each letter by the corresponding values below. Then, add up your points:

a = one point
b = two points
c = three points
d = four points

5–7 points: **Fortress School.** Your school is trying to keep parents away rather than work with them. In standards-based terms, it is ***below basic.***

8–11 points: **Come If We Call School.** Your school wants parents to be involved, but only on its terms. In standards-based terms, it is at the ***basic*** level.

12–15 points: **Open-Door School.** Your school welcomes families and supports them to be involved in a number of ways. In standards-based terms, it is ***proficient.***

16–20 points: **Partnership School.** Your school is willing and able to work with all families. We bet the student achievement level goes up every year. In standards-based terms, it is ***advanced.***

Chapter 2. Changing Roles for Changing Times

Despite recent reforms, including the near-universal use of standards and assessments, many schools and students still are struggling to boost their progress. For example, the 2003 Reading Assessment by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) showed that fourth graders' reading achievement has not improved significantly since 1992. Eighth-grade reading achievement has improved slightly. In the 1999 Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), average scores of students from the United States ranked 19th in math and 18th in science among 38 countries.

In the United States, schools that serve high-poverty communities tend to be among the lowest performing, and the number of children living in poverty is growing. The poorest families, those with incomes under $10,000, have a higher birth rate (73 babies a year per 1,000 women) than families earning more than $75,000 (50 babies a year per 1,000 women). In addition, births to unmarried women are rising. Children raised by single mothers are three times more likely to live in poverty than a child living with two parents, married or not.

Children raised in poverty come to school well behind their better-off classmates. According to *Inequality at the Starting Gate,* a report from the Economic Policy Institute, kindergartners from the poorest fifth of the nation's families own less than half as many books as children from the wealthiest fifth. Poor children spend almost twice as many hours watching television, in part because they don't have access to high-quality child care. Poor children also are more than twice as likely to have moved at least three times by the time they are five years old.

Changing demographics place other demands on schools. According to Harold L. Hodgkinson's report, *Leaving Too Many Children Behind*, here are some of the significant trends.

- America is becoming more diverse. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, between 1986 and 1999, the percentage of African-American students in public schools increased from 16.1 to 17.2; Hispanic students, from 9.9 to 15.6 percent; Asian/Pacific Islander, from 2.8 to 4.0 percent; and Native American, from .09 to .05 percent. By the end of the next decade, there will be no majority ethnic group among children under age five.

- Family composition also is changing. In 1999, about a third (33 percent) of all births were to unmarried parents, up from about a quarter (26 percent) in 1990. According to the *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, 46 percent of married couples, 60 percent of single women, 22 percent of gay couples and 34 percent of lesbian couples are raising children. Four million children live with their grandparents.

- More parents have jobs. In 1980, 38 percent of women with young children worked outside the home; by 1998, that number had risen to 59 percent.

- Student turnover is high. Of nearly 300 million Americans, 43 million move each year. A classroom may start and end with the same number of students, but more than half of them may be different by the end of the year. Low-income children move more often than middle-income children do, making adjustment to school more difficult for them and their families.

From the schools' point of view, these changes mean that working with families has become increasingly difficult, complex and confusing. There are fewer active, responsible parents per child, and they are working full time or more. A family may be in the neighborhood for only a few months and have no fixed address or telephone.

America's new demographics, work habits and attitudes also have made parents less likely to become involved with their civic institutions — including schools. Robert Putnam, a professor of public policy at Harvard, detailed the changes in his classic study *Bowling Alone* (2000).

> For the first two-thirds of the 20th Century, Americans' involvement in civic associations of all sorts rose steadily, except during the Great Depression. In the last third of the century, by contrast, only mailing list membership has continued to expand. … At the same time, active involvement in face-to-face organizations has plummeted. … Formal membership in organizations has edged downward by 10-20 percent … and active involvement in clubs and other voluntary associations has collapsed at an astonishing rate … . (p. 63)

PTA membership offers a striking illustration. From its founding in 1897, PTA numbers grew steadily until 1960, when almost half of all families with children under 18 were members. Since 1960, the decline in membership has been almost as fast. Now, only about one-fifth of families with school-age children belong to the PTA. Even taking into account the growth of competing groups, such as Parent-Teacher Organizations (PTOs), this dramatic drop represents a troubling change in parents' relationships with their children's schools.

Experts see this growing parent alienation as yet another challenge that schools must overcome. Not only does parent involvement provide important support to students, but it also helps parents build valuable leadership skills and social capital.

Opportunity for Change

On the other hand, more than a decade of education reform has given parents more leverage with schools. Additional measures like school governance councils, school improvement teams, and state and district parent involvement policies have further opened the door for parents to work with schools to make lasting, substantive changes. Here are some of the key changes that are fostering parent leadership today.

- State and district standards, produced over a decade of efforts in almost every state, establish clearer expectations for what children should know and be able to do at each grade level in each subject. In many states, however, both the standards and the tests that measure student achievement are still works in progress.

- The 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) now holds our nation's schools accountable for the academic achievement of all students. For the first time, schools must demonstrate adequate progress every year or face significant consequences, including losing students to other schools and, ultimately, being shut down.

- Annual report cards and other data on test results mandated by NCLB and many state laws give parents unprecedented information about how their local schools are performing. Parents can learn what progress their schools are making in meeting academic standards and how they stack up to other schools in the state or district. The report cards also make it clear whether each school is meeting the needs of all its students, including those groups that often have been poorly served.

- Legislative mandates, legal action and social-demographic shifts have prompted a greatly expanded menu of school offerings. These include services for students with disabilities, extended-day programs, and English language programs for immigrant students and families.

- There is a strong and unified groundswell for reform. Parents, voters, students, educators and policymakers all are clamoring for public schools to do a better job of educating all students and preparing them for postsecondary education and the workforce. Improving education consistently ranks as the most important concern among the American public.

Separately and together, these trends probably will alter the way schools do their jobs for decades to come. With little precedent to guide them — and under great political pressure — educators and policymakers are struggling to satisfy both the legislative mandates and their constituencies, while giving all children the instruction they need to succeed. Funding shortfalls in many states and districts compound the issue by forcing hard choices about allocating scarce resources. It seems clear that school districts cannot succeed without a major increase in community support.

In this environment of challenge and change, parents have a historic opportunity to identify issues, influence decisions and improve their schools. Among all the competing interests, they are well positioned to make their voices heard by offering a vision of positive change and engaging other parents who care about how schools are serving their children.

Breaking the Mold

Today's parent leadership is the culmination of ongoing, sweeping changes in the way parents, schools and communities interact as our nation has evolved from a largely rural-small town population to the more centralized urban-suburban distribution we recognize today.

At the beginning of the 20th century, America had about 100,000 local school districts, each run by a school board made up of parents and other citizens. The board built schools, hired teachers, decided what should be taught, and made other decisions directly affecting the operations of the school. Teachers often lived with the families of their students.

Over the years, most small districts combined to form sprawling, consolidated school systems, until there are just about 16,000 today. These are run by superintendents and their staffs, while school boards set policy and hire the superintendent. As school and district staffs have become more specialized, parents increasingly have delegated the responsibility for educating children to the professionals. Although well-educated and well-connected suburban parents usually can contact a principal or board member about a problem, even those parents often complain about their lack of influence. Most parents without these advantages don't even know how the system works, much less how to make their voices heard. Parents of all backgrounds get the message that "we professionals know what's best — and your place is at home, not at school."

As a result, most schools set the rules for parent contact with the people responsible for their children's education. Interactions usually take place at crowded events like open houses, back-to-school nights, student performances and report card pickup days. These situations encourage social pleasantries and surface conversation instead of building relationships and exchanging substantive information. One-on-one conversations between parent and teacher are limited to one or two conferences a year, each typically lasting 20 minutes or less. If parents or teachers request a special meeting, it is often about a problem or complaint, and the encounter can be tense and difficult.

Even where parent involvement is organized and extensive, parents tend to play largely supportive roles. The dominant form of parent involvement is the traditional parent-teacher organization, such as the PTA, PTSA or PTO, which has changed little since you — or your parents — went to school. Today, active PTAs are found largely in the suburbs and in elementary schools. In the cities and diverse inner-ring suburbs, the parent organizations that do exist tend to be small and dominated by an in-crowd of middle class parents. Lower-income families and families of color tend to shy away, although some PTA chapters are now mounting aggressive outreach campaigns.

During the education reforms of the 1960s and 1970s, many progressive schools and districts created opportunities for parents to have a greater voice. These ranged from limited power-sharing vehicles such as school governance councils, advisory committees and school improvement teams to hiring parents as paraprofessional employees. The

community schools movement created schools that were open year-round, offering recreation, health and social services, adult education, child care, and other programs that community councils recommended. Some schools also offered increased opportunities for parents to act as advocates, such as personal learning plans for students that parents help develop and approve. These reforms have enriched the schools and allowed genuine collaboration.

Since the early 1990s, the idea of developing independent parent leadership has gathered strength with the growing standards-based reform movement. Using the new accountability provisions, parents and community members have begun organizing outside of schools. They are pushing both for greater mutual accountability for student progress and to obtain more resources for student learning. These organizers contend that the forms of parent involvement practiced in most schools have not kept pace with increasing urbanization and diversity and that the relationship between schools and communities must be restructured dramatically.

More Powerful Roles for Parents

According to the research, parent involvement takes many forms — from helping children with homework to organizing demonstrations at school board meetings. Parents' activities tend to fall into four main roles.

Parents as teachers — Parents establish a home environment that promotes learning, reinforce what is being taught at school, and develop the values and life skills children need to become responsible adults.

Parents as supporters of education — Parents contribute their knowledge and skills to the school, demonstrate the importance of education and hard work, and take part in school board elections and other activities that promote education.

Parents as advocates for their own and for all children — Parents guide their children's careers in school, plan for their future, resolve problems and disputes, press schools for better programs and higher achievement, and work to make the system more responsive to all families.

Parents as decisionmakers — Parents serve on school governance councils, advisory committees and school improvement teams. They conduct action research, take part in decisions about programs and staffing, and contribute to joint problem-solving at every level.

Research has found that children do best when their parents are able to be involved in their children's learning in all four ways. The more schools are bound by views formed in years past, however, the more they are likely to limit the roles parents are welcome to play. In nearly all schools today, parents are encouraged to help their children at home and volunteer for specific tasks at school — to be teachers and supporters of education.

These are the time-tested roles parents have played for many decades, and both schools and families are comfortable with them.

In the pressure-cooker of standards-based reform, however, educators and parents increasingly recognize that families must have a voice in major decisions that affect their own and other children. This kind of engagement forges a new relationship between parents and schools, based on shared responsibility and mutual accountability.

Across the country, from Boston to Los Angeles and from Chicago to El Paso, parent and community leaders are rallying other parents and their neighbors to hold schools accountable for the achievement of all students. Empowered by the high expectations that standards impose, many parents are insisting that they be recognized as full working partners. They are using data on schools to identify problems, and they are actively working with their local teachers and principals to close achievement gaps. They understand budgets and how policy is made. They are facilitating meetings; mediating conflicts; and engaging the larger community, including business leaders and public officials, to build support for changes in education policy.

In all their efforts, the new parent leaders stay focused on what reformers call "The Main Thing" — improved achievement for all students. They are rewarded not only by the improvements they achieve, but also by the increased sense of power and relevance that comes from setting their own agenda and getting results.

Assessing Your Attitudes

Whether a school limits parents to traditional roles or embraces their leadership often depends on the attitudes of school leaders, such as officers of the parent association or the principal and senior staff. Which set of attitudes about parent involvement more closely resembles those at your school?

Traditional Parent Involvement:	**Parent Leadership:**
☐ It is the school's job to determine how parents should be involved.	☐ Parents should be fully involved in deciding how to engage the school's families.
☐ Only well-educated parents should be involved in the classroom.	☐ Every family has something important to contribute to children's learning.
☐ Parents' primary role is to reinforce at home what the school is teaching.	☐ Parents and teachers share responsibility for children's learning.
☐ Most parents want to leave their children's education to the experts and don't want to intrude in school matters.	☐ Most parents want to be actively engaged in their children's learning and to be consulted about school policies.
☐ Parents are interested primarily in their own children.	☐ Parents are concerned about the success of all children.
☐ Schools know best about students and their needs. Parents should let educators do their jobs.	☐ Schools should recognize that all parents are experts about their children and have much to offer educators.
☐ Families should make their homes more like the school.	☐ A school should reflect its families' cultural backgrounds and traditions.
☐ Few parents want to take leadership responsibility.	☐ Parents can be at different stages of readiness for leadership. Many want more responsibility.
☐ Problems at school should be resolved within the school. Involving families might undermine community support and damage the school's reputation.	☐ When problems arise, the principal and staff should reach out to all who are affected. Many problems cannot be resolved without active community support and cooperation.

Chapter 3. What the Research Tells Us: Benefits All Around

When parents are fully engaged — from working with their children at home and being involved in the life of the school to becoming advocates for strong public education in their community — research tells us that everyone can reap substantial benefits. In the words of Steve St. Clair, the former principal of Conway Middle School in Louisville, KY:

> Parent leaders can communicate a vision with other parents, often in a way that staff members cannot. Of all the variables in a child's life, I believe that parent involvement has the highest correlation with student success. It is truly the most untapped resource that we have.

Students

According to *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement* (2002), a research review published by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, there is a powerful link between parent involvement and positive student outcomes. Students with involved parents, no matter what their income or background, are more likely to:

- earn higher grades and test scores, and enroll in higher-level programs;
- be promoted, pass their classes and earn credits;
- attend school regularly;
- have better social skills, show improved behavior and adapt well to school; and
- graduate and go on to postsecondary education.

Students whose parents are involved are also LESS likely to require special education, drop out of school, be arrested or require public assistance.

Furthermore, studies show that families of all income and education levels, and from all ethnic and cultural groups, are involved at home. They help their children with homework, read and tell stories, talk to them about school, and plan for their future. The more that schools work with and encourage families to be involved in these ways, the more students like school and the longer they stay in school.

Parents

When schools engage parents, parents develop more confidence in themselves and in the school. By engagement, we mean welcoming parents and family members into the school, helping them build relationships with teachers and other staff, informing them about the school's educational program and student progress, offering classes and workshops, giving them a voice in decisions that affect their children, and helping them

connect to community resources. The teachers they work with have higher opinions of them as parents — and higher expectations of their children. As a result, the parents often go back to school themselves.

Parents who become leaders are better able to support their children's learning — both through their active presence at the school and through the skills and contacts they gain in their leadership activities. Taking a leadership role and achieving success help parents develop a greater sense of their own power to influence their children's future and to make a better life for themselves. Researchers call this efficacy, or the power to have an effect. In *Parental Efficacy: Predictor of Parenting Behavior and Adolescent Outcomes,* researchers Lee Shumow and Richard Lomax show that parents' sense of efficacy is related to their children's higher achievement in school.

Parent leaders also can:

- gain management and executive skills that they can transfer to their jobs or home-based issues;
- make helpful contacts and build social networks that they can use to create opportunities for their children and themselves;
- develop closer ties to their communities and neighbors; and
- learn how to influence decisions made in their schools and communities.

Schools

The research is also clear about the benefits for schools when parents are more involved in education. Teachers feel more support from parents and have higher morale. Parents rate teachers more highly and are more likely to support the school through volunteering and other activities. In the community, schools that are open to families tend to have a better reputation than schools that are seen as more closed — deservedly so, because student achievement is also likely to be higher.

In their book, *Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for Improvement*, Tony Byrk and Barbara Schneider found a strong connection between trust levels and student achievement in Chicago public schools. After developing measures of trust, they surveyed school staff about their opinions of each other and of parents. Then they compared schools with high and low trust levels. Schools with high trust among teachers, the principal and parents were much more likely to be in the top 25 percent of student performance. And schools with low trust among teachers, parents and the principal were much more likely to be in the bottom 25 percent.

What Is the Teacher-Parent Trust Level in Your School?

In *Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for Improvement,* Tony Byrk and Barbara Schneider identify interactions and behavior that characterize various levels of trust that teachers feel for parents. Which group of statements best describes the feeling of teachers in your school?

No Trust: Teachers feel they get little or no respect from parents and believe that talking with parents does not help them understand students better. They perceive very little support from parents and feel there is a lot of conflict between parents and teachers. They also report that few teachers really care about the school community.

Minimal Trust: Teachers feel some respect from (and for) parents. They agree that talking with parents helps their efforts, but feel parents give them little support at home. Only some teachers agree that parents are partners in educating their children.

Strong Trust: Teachers report a lot of respect between parents and teachers. They feel that talking with parents is helpful and that a majority of families support their teaching at home. About half of teachers say they care about the community and feel good about parent support.

Very Strong Trust: Almost all teachers feel great respect from and for parents and report no conflict between parents and teachers. They see parents as partners in education and feel good about the amount of support they receive. They also believe that nearly all teachers care about the school community.

Another study of Chicago schools found that parent leadership has an impact on improved reading achievement. All schools in Chicago are governed by local school councils that have a majority of parents elected by other parents. These councils select and evaluate the principal, develop school improvement plans, and develop and approve the school budget. The study found that elementary schools with more effective school councils were significantly more likely to have improved student achievement in reading. Schools with effective councils moved from 20 percent to 37 percent of students reading at the national average, compared to no significant increase for schools with ineffective councils.

> Chicago's local school councils and the social networks among parents, neighbors and school staff that have developed as a result … are a unique, nationally significant model of the kind of civic engagement that Putnam and other social scientists have identified as being key to improving the quality of a community. (Moore, 1998)

Communities also gain by having a committed cadre of well informed, engaged and effective parents. Instead of seeing parents as the enemy, public officials come to recognize parent leaders as natural allies in building support for school improvement initiatives. Parents who become involved in schools are more likely to become active in other aspects of the community, such as neighborhood advisory councils. As the evaluation of Kentucky's Commonwealth Institute found, many go on to run for school council and other local offices, including school board. (Wilson and Corbett, 2000)

As schools move toward partnership with families, parents tend to move beyond their concern for their own child toward commitment for all children. This expanded focus can make an important difference in a school. When parents are intent on improving all children's achievement, the conversations between parents and teachers can encompass broader issues, practices and challenges that affect how learning happens in the classroom. Parents' actions also become more purposeful and supportive of schools. As their confidence and contacts grow, they can build organizations that can partner with schools from a position of power.

With parents as partners, schools are more likely to build the kind of strong, trusting relationships that expand social and political capital and that lead to positive, sustainable change. In addition, parent leaders are able to tap opportunities and resources that may not be available to the schools working alone. For example, here are some ways CIPL graduates have opened doors for schools in Kentucky.

- ***Reaching and engaging other parents*** **—** Parent leaders can mediate between educators and other parents, offering guidance about how the system works, as well as friendly faces to steer parents and other family members through unfamiliar halls. To ensure a good turnout for student-led parent conferences, parent leaders at Conway Middle School first held an information fair where families could learn about the new approach to conferences and other school programs. This event drew families into the school, many for the first time, making them more comfortable with the idea of meeting their child's teachers. Parent leaders also arranged transportation and child care.

  Parent leaders also can help schools bridge class and cultural differences between families and school staff. For example, Rita Gerretson and Pam Waddles, CIPL graduates who worked as parent liaisons in the Appalachian region of Eastern Kentucky, supported students by reaching out to poor families, many of whom are illiterate. Gerretson and Waddles made home visits, referring parents to adult literacy courses and stocking small local libraries with materials for parents, explaining how to read school report cards, and suggesting ways parents can support their children's learning. They also trained parents to make home visits to other parents.

- ***Tapping connections in the community*** **—** Noticing that many children with reading difficulties lived too far away to take advantage of help provided by the school's extended services program, CIPL graduate Julie Schroeder decided to develop a targeted summer reading program closer to their homes. Using the zip codes from

students' addresses, she met with key neighborhood and church leaders to identify community centers near where most students lived. She found directors at two sites who eagerly offered assistance. To improve participation, Schroeder applied for grants and federally subsidized meal service to feed students during the workshops.

- ***Teaming up with teachers to develop student achievement projects that teachers may not have time to take on alone —*** Concerned by low science scores on the annual state assessment, as well as a wide achievement gap between students from poor and affluent families, CIPL graduate Pam Taylor won support from her school's principals and teachers for a program of science enrichment. At Taylor's invitation, a professional chemist — also a parent — presented interactive science experiments in fourth- and fifth-grade classrooms and showed teachers how to broaden their instruction. Taylor also assembled science project kits that parents and students could use at home. School faculty made sure that all science research projects were tied to Kentucky's core content standards.

  At the end of the first year, Taylor and other parents helped the school hold a popular Science Night where students presented their research findings to a panel of science professionals. Prompted by growing attendance, the school now holds two Science Nights annually — one for the two grades taking the state tests that year and another for the rest of the students.

  The results are striking. In 2001, the school's scores on the state science exam increased nearly 14 percentage points from the previous year, and 2002 scores were 10 points higher than 2001. In addition, test score gains among students from poor families (about half the school's population) narrowed the school's science achievement gap by 10 points in the first year. The achievement gap between poor students and their classmates continued to narrow in 2002.

School Districts

Sometimes the problem of low achievement, or of wide achievement gaps between groups of students, is districtwide. Parents and community members can press schools and districts for better results, using requirements for school improvement in state and federal education reform laws. Louisville parents Cindy Baumert and Kathleen Driskell were aware of a new state law (Senate Bill 168) mandating schools to close achievement gaps, but worried that their local schools seemed to be doing little or nothing about it. They also noticed that the local newspaper was not covering the issue. The pair collaborated with Deborah Stallworth, president of a mostly African American parent group, to organize a luncheon for church leaders. At this event a sponsor of the state law asked for help in engaging congregations to partner with schools and become involved in the planning process to close the gaps.

Organizing as the "Community for 168," Baumert and Driskell followed up with community meetings to introduce and gain support for the project. They prepared a

volunteer speakers' packet that includes time lines and other details of the state-mandated accountability process; a guide to effective practices for closing achievement gaps; and lists of talking points, possible questions and terms volunteers might encounter. The Kentucky Department of Education now offers this packet to school districts around the state, and the district has used the initiative as a tool to engage parents and the community to close achievement gaps.

Parent leadership initiatives have had dramatic successes in districts outside of Kentucky as well. For example, in Boston, the Boston Parent Organizing Network (BPON) organized a series of public forums and meetings with state legislators, city council members and the mayor to protest drastic budget cuts to the public schools. Working closely with other community groups, the Boston teachers' union and the Stop the Cuts Coalition, BPON parents and member organizations persuaded the Legislature to restore $54 million in aid to the city of Boston. Then they went to work on the mayor to make sure those funds went to the public schools.

BPON parents did their homework. They found that the state spent more on its prison system than on education, prompting Boston Public Schools parent activist Yvonne Ferguson to speak at a public forum. "I think that anger is in order today! What message are we giving to mothers when we will not educate their sons, but will incarcerate them? Only the wealthy deserve a decent life in the commonwealth."

BPON also put out materials and information refuting the myth of "Taxachusetts," which says that the state taxes and spends more than other states. They cited a 2000 report by the Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center, which found that the state is near the bottom of all 50 states on education spending as a share of personal income.

These examples show that even "fortress" districts and schools can open up when parent leaders use community-organizing techniques to impel change. Some results of parent and community action documented in recent studies include:

- upgraded school facilities;
- improved school leadership and staffing;
- higher quality learning programs for students;
- new resources and programs to improve teaching and curriculum; and
- increased funding for after-school programs and family supports.

(Henderson and Mapp, 2003)

Community Organizing for School Reform

In a growing number of districts across the country, community groups are organizing a powerful base of parents and residents in lower-income neighborhoods to press for better public schools. Several research studies found that organized actions by these parents and community members have contributed to significant improvements in schools where poor performance and other problems had been accepted as inevitable.

Key strategies used by community organizers include:

- building a base of parents and community members to engage in collective action such as rallies, demonstrations and mass attendance at school board meetings;
- negotiation with public officials, focusing on winning concrete changes;
- supporting democratic decisionmaking by including members in all aspects of the organization;
- developing leadership among members within the organization; and
- building a strong organization that can alter the inequitable power relationships that lead to failing schools.

Here are some examples.

- In New York City, parents living in newly renovated low-income housing in the South Bronx refused to accept official nonanswers when they learned that their local elementary school was among the worst performing in the city. Organizing as the New Settlement Apartments Parent Action Committee (PAC), the parents used the school rankings and other data to build a successful campaign to remove the principal and gain a role in choosing new leadership. Later, with the cooperation of a new principal, PAC conducted investigations into safety and the math program at the school.

- In Oakland, CA, neighborhood parents won an eight-year battle to use the site of an abandoned warehouse for a small neighborhood school. The parents had joined forces with a coalition of community organizations to fight plans by developers to use the site for commercial purposes.

- In Chicago, the Logan Square Neighborhood Association (LSNA) mounted a multiyear campaign to reduce school overcrowding. Their efforts led to construction of five elementary school annexes and two middle schools, as well as to strong collaborative relationships with principals and teachers. LSNA also has trained more than 800 Parent Mentors to work in local classrooms and has established evening community learning centers and parent programs in several schools. Reading achievement scores have risen in LSNA's six "core schools."

Source: Mediratta, Fruchter and Lewis, 2002

Chapter 4. Making It Happen: What Parent Leaders Need To Know and Be Able To Do

In most districts, developing parent leadership will require a new look at traditional attitudes toward authority, participation and service. Being an effective leader involves a set of knowledge, skills and approaches that few parents have had the opportunity to develop.

Parents who step forward deserve training that can help them become proficient in areas such as:

- gaining access to and interpreting data and other information;
- using data to develop proactive strategies to address problems and set priorities;
- constructing new roles for themselves as parent leaders; and
- understanding people from different cultures and backgrounds, and learning how to work together.

Follow-up coaching and support are essential. Most organizations that promote and train parent leaders offer on-site technical assistance to work through tough issues or personality clashes. They also can help parents at a school site build a powerful organization, by providing sample by-laws, communications tools like a Web site or hotline, contacts to community groups, and expert trainers and presenters.

For many parents, this is not entirely unfamiliar territory. Parents whose jobs involve managing projects or people will be able to transfer these skills to their work with schools. Others can draw on their experience as family managers or as leaders in other community organizations and transfer those skills to school settings. Still, parents of all backgrounds will need information about how the school system works, their rights and responsibilities, effective approaches to school improvement, standards-based curricula and assessments, and new approaches to teaching and learning.

On the following pages, we give four examples of different approaches to parent leadership training. While we have relied heavily on the experience of the Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership because it is the program we know best, and is one of the most extensive, we acknowledge that there are many other organizations and initiatives that have achieved valuable results. Some of these are discussed elsewhere in these pages. While various parent leadership programs have their own ideas about training and what it should cover, they all agree that parents should be able to make a real difference for children.

Parents as Partners: The CIPL Approach

The Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership (CIPL) requires every participant to create and implement a project that will do three things: improve student achievement, engage more parents in children's learning and have a lasting impact.

CIPL training offers parents a broad base of knowledge and skills for working within the education system. During the three two-day sessions, participants explore the system, by listening to presentations, working in small groups and touring an exhibit of state programs. They do "homework" — obtaining copies of their school's improvement plans, attending school council meetings and completing checklists. They also look at the data from their schools and districts, learning how to read report cards and data charts broken down (or "disaggregated") by race, gender, income level, disability and English proficiency. Curriculum consultants from the Kentucky Department of Education share samples of student work, along with scoring guides, so that parents can learn more about how standards are used in classrooms and the differences between basic and proficient work.

CIPL participants also take part in interactive exercises to help them be more sensitive to parents from varied backgrounds. One evening is devoted to telling each other's education stories in small groups to share experiences and build social and emotional connections. Participants learn to facilitate a process developed by the Prichard Committee, called Parents and Teachers Talking Together (PT3). Group-process workshops help improve participants' skills in agenda planning, running meetings, setting priorities and consensus-building. Resource organizations describe their services, give contact information and answer questions.

Training sessions are delivered by community support coordinators (CSCs) from the Prichard Committee staff, who maintain ongoing contact with graduates. The CSCs are based in regions around the state, and many are CIPL graduates. In program evaluations, CIPL fellows cited CSC support as an essential element of the program.

The CIPL curriculum is designed around three goals.

1. Improving Student Achievement: What do parents need to know to be able to design and carry out projects that will have an impact on student achievement?

- How the state standards-based education system works: the basic components and how they interact (e.g., standards, testing, school improvement plans, technical assistance, and consequences for little or no progress); as well as access points where parents can speak out, ask questions, offer proposals and influence decisions.
- How to use student achievement data: finding out how schools are doing, understanding what different achievement levels mean, identifying achievement gaps between groups of students and using data to drive improvement.
- How children learn: new approaches to improve student learning, looking at student work in the light of standards, effective teaching practice and effects parents have on improving student achievement.

2. Increasing Parent Involvement: What steps do parents need to take to engage other parents, especially parents who have not been involved at school and whose children may be struggling?

- Finding out the many skills and experiences that parents can offer and how they can be tapped.
- Asking key questions in nonthreatening ways (What are some things that you and your children enjoy doing at home? What would help you be more involved at the school? What are your child's special interests and talents? What do you like about the school, and what do you think would make it better?)
- Getting beyond stereotypes and connecting in a meaningful way with families of all backgrounds.
- Running an effective meeting: using group process to get all points of view, identifying common goals, resolving conflict and developing a plan for action.
- Facilitating a constructive dialogue between parents and teachers.

3. Having a Lasting Impact: How can parents have a lasting impact? What do they need to know to help themselves and other families become powerful advocates for improved education and higher achievement for all students?

- How power and authority are exercised in schools, who has power; and how parents can have a voice in decisions.
- Ways to get a project or program adopted by the school and into the school improvement plan.
- How to raise money: what's involved in getting a grant and what are some local or state sources of funding?
- How to plan and run effective meetings: What builds a strong group? How can we work effectively together?
- How to find sources of help: What resources are available in our community?

In follow-up surveys, CIPL fellows reported increased understanding about the state education system, more confidence that they could take part in school improvement and a readiness to act on behalf of all students. In their 2000 report, *I Didn't Know I Could Do That,* Bruce Wilson and Dick Corbett observe that of the first 1,000 participants in the CIPL program, more than 450 became members of school-based councils or other school committees, and 21 serve on local school boards. More than 50 percent have completed projects in their schools.

In addition, about half of CIPL graduates report using the following skills "often" or "very often":

- reading materials related to improving student achievement;
- seeking advice from other parents about school improvement activities;
- working with the principal on school improvement; and
- working in parents' groups and/or with teachers to improve student achievement.

Principals with experience working with parent leaders feel strongly that training and support is key to their success. Steve St. Clair, the former principal at Conway Middle School, observes:

> The beauty of the Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership is that it unlocks the potential in a parent leader. As a principal, it is much easier to communicate the school's needs and goals with parents who have had this kind of training. … Once we began involving our parents in professional development along with our staff, we realized that parents, if properly informed, could support our school in deeper ways than we had thought.

Parents as Advocates: The PURE Approach

Parents United for Responsible Education (PURE) began in 1987, when the Chicago schools were closed for almost three weeks by a strike. Parents held classes for their children outside City Hall to protest the shutdown, and organized PURE to promote changes that needed to be made to improve the system. The next year, PURE played a major role in shaping the Chicago school reform law. At PURE's insistence, the law established elected local school councils (LSCs) with a majority of parent members, elected by parents. The LSCs approve the school budget and annual school improvement plan, and they hire, evaluate and can fire the principal.

After the reform law passed, PURE presented workshops to encourage parents, teachers and community members to run for the local councils. More than 17,000 candidates ran in the first election. After the election, PURE trained thousands of LSC members in the details of the new law and published newsletters with up-to-date and independent information about education and school reform issues.

Since then, PURE has developed a program to help parents build support for, and enhance the quality of, public education in Chicago. To highlight the parent perspective on critical school problems, PURE holds press conferences, gives public testimony and places editorials in local news media. Newsletters, workshops and conferences inform parents about educational issues. Meetings with district leaders, school board members and other policymakers convey the views of parents so that they are considered in the decisionmaking process. Through a hotline, PURE provides direct assistance or referrals to hundreds of parents and local school council (LSC) members calling for help and information. PURE also acts as an advocate for parents in their relationships with the school administration.

Tools and supports provided by PURE to parents and LSCs include:

- **Written Information —** a resource library (including law, school board policies, guidelines and informational materials, and literature on best practices) and PURE tip sheets and fact sheets.

- **Basic Local School Council (LSC) training (in English and Spanish) —** understanding LSC roles and responsibilities, the basics of running meetings (setting

an agenda, maintaining order, working with principal, etc.), and exercising the full authority of an LSC.

- **In-depth LSC training —** getting familiar with the school budget (documents needed, questions to ask), managing the relationship with the principal (setting expectations and problem-solving) and increasing LSC input into the school improvement plan.

- **Ongoing LSC support and assistance —** consistent, hands-on assistance with specific LSC issues; support at LSC meetings, including help dealing with occasional interference from the school district; and a telephone hotline. PURE also offers help clarifying and documenting issues/problems, testifying at school board meetings, and writing letters to policymakers.

- **Parent Leadership Training —** what to look for in a good school and steps to support quality education at your child's school; how to be an active parent (tips and facts on parent-teacher communication and setting and achieving your goals); parliamentary procedure and how to run effective meetings; and school safety (starting a parent patrol and how parents can make a difference in school safety).

PURE supports parents in multiple ways. The following mini-case study is illustrative. At Parkside Elementary School, the LSC balked at the principal's proposal and budget for the school improvement plan. The plan included creating four new professional positions. The LSC members, a majority of them parents, believed that the funds would be better spent on programs to assist students. The principal refused to revise the plan.

Why did the school need a new computer teacher, the LSC asked, when the computer lab was used only for playing games? They also disputed the need for a disciplinarian, a coordinator for the school's Title I program and another "program coordinator." They felt it was not the best use of funds to add high-paying positions that were not clearly related to helping students.

Johnny Holmes, an advocate with PURE, worked with council members to review the budget and express their concerns clearly. In addition to helping the council prepare testimony for the school board meeting, Holmes also supported the council at LSC meetings with Chicago school district staff.

Holmes then helped the council develop its own written amendment to the plan. Changes to the plan resulted in:

- savings of $260,000, which had been budgeted for a computer teacher and three administrative positions;
- hiring a full-time school psychologist to address students' behavioral issues instead of doling out discipline;

- an upgraded and academically oriented computer lab and new textbooks; and
- an intervention program for eighth graders at risk of not graduating.

Parents as Community Organizers: The IESP Approach

The Institute for Education and Social Policy (IESP) at New York University supports community organizing in New York City through its Community Involvement Program (CIP). Efforts focus on two interconnected areas: supporting specific neighborhood-based organizing groups and convening organizing groups to work in concert on common issues.

In its neighborhood-based work**,** CIP helps community-based organizations develop their capacity to lead school improvement campaigns in their neighborhoods. All groups assisted by CIP are working in low- and moderate-income neighborhoods and communities of color. Support includes:

- training on schooling issues and strategies for organizing and developing community leadership;
- analysis and presentation of data on school performance and expenditures;
- consultation on developing strategies and internal capacity to carry out the organizing work;
- brokering relationships to other sources of information and support; and
- assessment and feedback on progress, barriers and overall strategy.

Local groups must meet certain requirements to receive support. First, a group should see itself as accountable to parents and residents and work to build their leadership capacity. It must address community problems through collective action strategies and develop a democratic decisionmaking process so that constituent concerns drive group activities. The group also must commit resources to support an organizer position.

CIP also provides information, training and forums that help community groups work together for systemic reform. New York Education Organizers Network, a network facilitated by CIP, meets monthly to share strategies, discuss challenges and explore organizing opportunities.

NYC Schoolwatch, a quarterly newsletter, reports on organizing work and highlights opportunities for organizing. As part of an effort to make New York City school system data easier to understand, each newsletter includes "Demystifying the Data." This insert focuses on one educational issue and explains it in a jargon-free manner.

CIP is a founding member of the Community Collaborative for District 9 (CC9) in the South Bronx. This collaborative of six community-based organizations organizes parents and residents for systemic changes in policies and practices across South Bronx schools. CIP is responsible for fundraising and reporting to foundations, facilitating

communication among the six organizations, and overseeing the CC9-wide organizing campaigns.

Parents as Community Organizers: Community Collaborative to Improve District 9 Schools (CC9)

The story of CC9 in the South Bronx shows how a small parent group can become a powerful force. In 1996, residents of the New Settlement Apartments (NSA) began meeting to discuss their concerns about local schools. NSA staff arranged a series of workshops on parents' rights, from which sprang the Parent Action Committee (PAC).

NSA support for the PAC was critical. NSA staff provided information, space, staff and help with fundraising. They also connected the PAC with other school reform efforts around New York City and with CIP. CIP first led the parents through a maze of data on the local elementary school, leading to the discovery that only 17 percent of students at the school could read at grade level. Next, CIP helped parents develop questions for school and district administrators about what was being done to improve achievement.

When the PAC members approached the District 9 school board about problems in the school, the superintendent and principal both denied serious problems and blamed students' families for low achievement. After a series of actions, including a petition to remove the principal and a dramatic demonstration that drew media attention, the principal resigned. A new principal now is willing to work with PAC, and the group is studying school safety issues and math achievement.

By 2000, the parent committee was ready to expand its work beyond one elementary school. It began meeting with other community groups, such as Bronx ACORN, Citizens Advice Bureau, and the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition, to discuss its research and ideas. These conversations led to the Community Collaborative to Improve District 9 schools, or CC9. The new group knew that to make change happen, it would take parents, teachers and principals working together. CC9 has since proposed a powerful platform for change in District 9. (Zachary, Olatoye and Mediratta, 2001) (For the CC9 platform, see *NCLB: What's in It for Parents*)

Chapter 5. Rising to the Challenge: Are Schools Ready for Parent Leaders?

Creating successful schools is a shared responsibility — this is the basic operating principle that underlies parent leadership. Putting this principle into practice is a major goal of parent leadership training.

As we have seen in the examples throughout this guide, this new way of working involves major changes in how parents and schools view and interact with each other. Building and maintaining mutual trust is essential. While either parents or school leaders can take the first step, the most effective partnerships will result when both embrace new expectations and responsibilities. Public officials on all levels can support partnerships by championing parent leadership and adopting policies that support parent-school partnership. Here are some specific steps that school leaders, parents and policymakers each can take.

What Can School Leaders Do?

Challenging deeply entrenched assumptions and ways of working takes commitment and skill, but it can generate real payoffs in supportive relationships, increased resources and higher student achievement. Schools can begin by examining their current policies and practices to see whether they welcome parents as partners or exclude them. (See "Is Your School Open to Partnership with Parents?" on page 11 of this report.)

Together, school leaders, teachers and staff can come up with new strategies to open their doors. Start by focusing all efforts to involve parents explicitly on improving student achievement. Think carefully about how each planned or existing program or activity will:

- help families understand what their children are learning in class;
- promote high standards for student work and knowledge about what proficient-level work looks like;
- understand what effective teaching practice looks like;
- help parents assist their children at home; and
- stimulate discussion about improving student progress.

Schools without formal parent leadership training programs can still develop the leadership potential of parents and families. First, examine what the district already is offering to families to see if these resources could be better coordinated and focused. Explore the resources of the state education agency, federal programs, local and state organizations, and foundations. What is their potential to create and support a parent training program?

If a school gets federal Title I funds, *at least* 1 percent of that money must be used to build parents' capacity to work with teachers to help their children. A Title I school also must have a parent involvement policy and a school-family compact. Ask these questions: When were the policy and compact last revised? How were parents involved in developing and approving them? How do the policy and compact reflect the actual learning needs of children in your school? (For ideas and more information, see *No Child Left Behind: What's in It for Parents*, referenced in the resource section.)

Take some time to consider this question: What topics, besides confidential personnel matters, does the school treat as off limits to families? If the list is long, perhaps the school should explore attitudes and trust issues among the staff. See "Assessing Your Attitudes" on page 19 and "What Is the Teacher-Parent Trust Level in Your School?" on page 22.

There are many examples of ways that school leaders have reached out to engage parents as partners. First, classrooms are opened to families so they can experience how and what students are learning. For families who can't come during the day, an evening "visit the classroom" program can display student work, along with standards and scoring guides. Schools also have combined student-led conferences with exhibits of student portfolios, where students explain how their work meets standards.

To explain further how students will be assessed, some schools have held "take the test" events. Parents try answering sample questions from the state assessment, look at their children's work and talk in small groups about the skills students need to do well on the test. Teachers share examples of class assignments and explain how they will develop problem-solving and other critical-thinking skills that the new standards require.

Schools that actively build parent leadership often develop a relationship with a local college, a university or another organization that offers training. Skills for developing partnerships with parents can be woven into every topic of staff development for teachers and other staff. For example, in considering a proposed policy, program or practice, school staff can explore its implications for families. They also can consider how to get information about it to parents. Even better, they can invite parents to the meetings where these programs are being discussed. Staff developers should ask parents for input when designing these sessions.

Some schools invite parents to staff development programs for teachers. Many parents are interested in learning about new approaches to teaching math, science and reading; positive discipline; conflict resolution; and ways to get high standards into the classroom. They also can offer valuable advice about how to work more effectively with families. Another step is to invite parents to staff meetings. Give them the opportunity to raise issues of concern, such as safety, discipline, grouping practices or achievement gaps. Include parents in discussions about assessment, new programs and staff training.

Expectations for Effective SCHOOL Leaders

Share power:
- Open up the decisionmaking process so that families have a voice.
- Give parents a role in selecting administrators, including the next principal.
- Deal with elected parent leaders, not parents hand-picked by the school administration.
- Find out the concerns of all the different groups of families in your school community. Reach out beyond the active middle class parents.
- Always consider the interests of all children.

Communicate expectations:
- Be clear about having high expectations for parents, as well as for the entire staff.
- Take time to define those expectations, in joint discussion with parents and staff.

Open doors:
- Give families full access to the school building.
- Be available — set regular office hours for the principal to meet with families.
- Hold frequent and open meetings — in a variety of settings, not just at school.
- Set a regular schedule for classroom observations.

Offer training:
- Offer workshops for teachers and other school staff (including classified staff) about how to communicate more effectively with parents and families. Include parents and family members.
- Give parents good information about standards, curriculum and assessment.
- Help parents understand the data on school performance.
- Offer workshops to parents and teachers on skills that will help them mediate conflicts and have more productive meetings.

Answer the hard questions:
- Be prepared and pleased to be challenged. Admit it when you don't know the answers. Get the information you need to respond.
- Give a state of the school report every year and report regularly through the year on how students are doing.
- Fully explain school test results and report cards.
- Share the school's improvement plan with families and the community.

Recognize and work with parent-led organizations:
- Recognize a variety of groups, not just the "official" school parent group.
- Provide resources: space; supplies; information; and facilities, such as computer time, copier and fax.
- Help arrange for food, activities for younger children and transportation.
- Be available to speak at their meetings.

Support regular, positive, two-way communications:
- Recognize that community organizations are part of the school community.
- Translate all communications (including report cards) into your families' languages and have interpreters available at all meetings and for phone calls.
- Publish a directory of community resources.
- Encourage school staff to reach out to parents, through regular telephone calls, home visits, and informal conversations at the start and close of the school day.

Give parents information about how the school system works:
- Share data and school improvement plans.
- Invite district staff and school board members to come to school to meet with parents about parents' concerns.
- Work with parent and community groups during election season. Help prepare an agenda for candidate meetings so that parents can raise their concerns, not just listen to campaign speeches.

Expectations for Effective PARENT Leaders

Use power wisely:
- Accept the obligations that come with having power.
- Go to meetings and events. Speak up when you have a question or problem.
- Ask for information when you need it.
- Take part in elections for school boards, school councils and PTA officers.
- Consider the interests of all children, not just your own.

Be accountable:
- Set high expectations for yourself and other parents, as well as school staff.
- Do what you say you will.
- Earn the trust of those you work with — keep private information to yourself.

Get training:
- Become familiar with standards, the curriculum and the state assessment.
- Understand and know how to use data about school performance.
- Develop the skills you need to make your case to different audiences, run meetings, recruit other parents, set an agenda, make a plan and put it into action.

Knock on doors:
- Build personal relationships. Get to know the principal, teachers, front office staff and everyone else who works at the school. Talk to parents one on one to let them know they are needed and can help.
- Be involved in structured activities and roles, such as parent-teacher organizations, but also take time to hang out and talk to people informally.
- Reach out to parents of all backgrounds by going to their neighborhoods and listening to their ideas and concerns.

Ask the hard questions:

- How is the curriculum aligned to standards? How are teachers held accountable for student progress in meeting those standards?
- Do students make steady gains, or is their progress uneven? How does their progress compare to other schools in the district?
- What progress is the school making in addressing achievement gaps between different groups of students, and who is responsible?
- What evidence do we have that the programs or strategies to improve achievement are working?
- What are the school's grouping or tracking practices? If there are lower tracks, how will those students catch up?
- Are parents and families doing all they can to help? What more is needed?

Organize your efforts:

- Engage other parents, especially those who have traditionally stayed away.
- Establish a formal organization. Identify needs and problems through group process.
- Set priorities and create projects to improve learning. Do the follow up work needed after issues have been identified.
- Set up and serve on committees and councils.
- Insist on a voice for parents in selecting principals and other school leaders.

Foster effective communications:

- Build a network of community organizations that can offer resources to families and to the school.
- Develop and implement a communications plan for reaching families on a regular basis.
- Take responsibility for keeping the school principal and school council in the loop for receiving feedback.

Learn how the system works:

- Understand your state's and school district's standards-based system.
- Access and understand student test data and other information about the school.
- Learn to make use of key leverage points in new federal and state laws (e.g., annual school report cards, parent participation in school improvement plans and school-family compacts).
- Identify the people who hold power in your district and state and develop relationships with them.

What Can Parents Do?

Although some schools actively promote parent leadership, parents in many communities will have to take the initiative to change the *status quo*. This means that people used to accepting passively the tasks assigned by principals and teachers will need to start taking active responsibility for change.

A perceptive superintendent once observed, "School systems, just like most other large organizations, don't change because they see the light. They change because they feel the heat."

Parents and other community activists must generate enough **heat** to make a difference. As "Collaboration Counts" makes clear, a single parent can rarely change much, other than getting his or her own child some extra help. Fifty parents with a well-developed agenda can do much more. Effective school leaders are not threatened by activism; they welcome allies for improving student achievement.

Generating heat, however, is not enough. Parent leaders also need to preach **hope.** They need to understand what is happening in high-performing schools and then share these examples with fellow parents, teachers, principals and other school leaders. They need to be able to point to these schools and say, "If they can do that there, why can't we try to do that here?" The new annual school report cards, now mandated by the federal government, should be a valuable resource to help parent leaders identify high-performing schools and make a case for change in their own schools.

Finally, parent leaders have a responsibility to **help.** As discussed in earlier chapters, this assistance can take many forms. Parents have surveyed other parents about school communications to find out how the school could do a better job, and they have surveyed students to find out why they were often absent. They have organized Family Math and Science Nights so that families can work together conducting experiments and solving problems. They have shown teachers and students how to use desktop publishing and other programs on the computer. They have worked with teachers to write curriculum guides for parents, and they have organized drama clubs to engage low-performing students. They recognize that job one is taking responsibility for the success of *all* children.

There are many examples of what parent leaders have done to demonstrate their commitment to making their schools the best they can be. Here are some steps that parents can take to foster heat, hope and help.

Get familiar with the school. Parent leaders drop into the school building during the day and get a feel for the school environment, including how teachers and principals interact with students and with each other. If the leaders don't feel welcome, they talk with other parents about their experience and what needs to change.

Step forward. Parent leaders will approach the principal or their child's teacher and express interest in becoming involved. If they have a specific idea or issue, they explain their position. But leaders do not wait for a problem to arise. The parents at Conway Middle School took on the principal's idea of student-led conferences and developed their own ideas for making it work.

Find out what's on other parents' minds. Leaders compare impressions with their neighbors and the families of their children's friends about what is happening at the school. Even when a school is open to parent partnerships, bringing many voices together offers the opportunity to examine all sides of an issue, work out effective positions and present a strong position to the school. There are many tools for holding structured discussions, such as study circles, town meetings and roundtables. The Prichard Committee has developed Parents and Teachers Talking Together, or PT3, a tool that parent leaders have used to develop common goals and priorities. (See the resource section for more information.) Keeping the focus on improving student achievement moves the discussion away from assigning blame for problems.

Collaboration Counts

If you think that you alone cannot do much to improve your school, you're probably right. But if you collaborate with other parents and organizations, you can make a difference.

There is power in numbers. This is how your school might react to you.

1 parent = A fruitcake
2 parents = A fruitcake and friend
3 parents = Troublemakers
5 parents = "Let's have a meeting"
10 parents = "We'd better listen"
25 parents = "Our dear friends"
50 parents = A powerful organization

Learn how your state education system works. What are the leverage points you can use to press schools for better results? (See *No Child Left Behind: What's in It for Parents* to learn more about six key leverage points for parents in federal law.) Parent leaders know how to use opportunities like requirements for school improvement plans and written parent involvement policies and compacts.

Analyze your school's achievement data. Parent leaders know how the schools in their district are performing and what is being done (or not done) to improve them. They talk to principals and teachers about needs they see and offer to organize other parents to help.

If the school is not responsive, leaders will organize parents to meet as a group with the principal and the school council to make the point more forcefully.

Run for school council or school board. Many parent leaders begin their careers in the school parent group, whether it's a PTA or Parent Association. Others start by joining the standards or curriculum committee or the school improvement team.

What Can District Policymakers Do?

District policymakers can support partnerships by setting high expectations for schools; by providing resources such as professional development, training and up-to-date information; and by recognizing and rewarding good programs and practices.
At the district level, superintendents, Title I directors and community relations directors should make it a priority to build a family-friendly culture of open access, inclusion and accountability in their districts and schools.

Commit the resources. Include permission and time for teachers to engage with parents in informal as well as structured ways. Offer administrative support for parent activities, such as transportation, insurance coverage, security and food services.

Ask parents what gets in the way — and respond. Many parents say they need translation services, transportation and child care. Holding meetings at the end of their workday, rather than later in the evening or during the day, is often more convenient for families, especially if they can bring the whole family and food is served. Keep the meetings short, two hours or less.

Make sure that schools do their job. Every school should develop and implement school-parent compacts and parent involvement policies. Policies and compacts should be developed with and approved by parents, and should give parents a genuine voice in crafting school improvement plans. Such policies are now mandated by the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law.

Get good advice. Create a district parent and community advisory council. Make sure all segments of your community are represented. This group can help with developing a district parent involvement policy and set up a process for getting parent input and approval.

Go beyond the usual suspects. Recognize and work with a wide variety of parent and community leaders. This means going beyond the established parent organization, like the PTA. Ask people who are running effective community programs who the real leaders are. Open up schools to parent and community groups based outside schools.

Connect schools and community partners. This may require investing in outreach staff and opening a family center. A family center can provide links to community resources and connect with organizations that reflect the diverse cultures of the community.

Get the message across. Make timely, understandable information about the system and student performance available to parents. This can be done through the Web, regular written reports, state of the school meetings, study circles and informal rap sessions. Annual school reports are now mandated by the new federal education law. They must be in languages that parents can understand, and they must be disseminated widely.

What Can State Policymakers Do?

State leaders also can examine their policies to make sure they are consistent with a broadened definition of parent leadership and school partnership. Effective policies will include these basic elements:

- Access to information for parent and community groups. Again, NCLB now mandates annual, parent-friendly public reporting on the performance of each school, as well as the district and state as a whole.
- Resources to help school districts engage families. These can include professional development for administrators, technical assistance to improve practice, multicultural resources and mini-grant programs. Federal law requires states to collect and distribute information on effective parent and family involvement practices.
- Recognition of local leadership in parent and community engagement. Remember that old saying, "what gets measured gets done." Set standards, and let districts know that you expect them to meet those. Reward and publicize them when they do.

State leaders can also take steps to build a support system to stimulate more parent and community engagement across the state.

Enforce the law. Monitor how districts carry out the Title I parent involvement requirements. Make sure that school districts have strong, up-to-date parent involvement policies — and that these policies have been developed with, and approved by, a wide range of parents. Collect these policies and post exemplary ones on your Web site.

Put parents on school councils. If your state requires local school councils, mandate that they have parent members, elected by other parents. (By law, school-based decisionmaking councils in Kentucky must have one principal, three teachers and two parents.) Give councils the right to recruit and select school administrators.

Get advice from the grassroots. Create a state parent-community advisory council and encourage districts to create district councils. Go outside your usual circle to identify members who really know what's going on, instead of appointing directors of state associations. Develop a network of contacts with local parent leaders and directors of effective community-based organizations. Don't rely solely on school district staff to identify who they are.

Be available. Invite local parent and community leaders to meet with the leadership of your organization to discuss common concerns. Attend and speak at their events and offer to help their organizations.

Bring people together. Hold a state conference every year or two to advance parent and community engagement. Include local leaders on the design team and address issues they have identified. Feature good programs and practices and give them awards.

Offer training across the state. Work with other organizations to establish a state parent and community leadership training program.

* * *

Conclusion

As a nation, we have made a promise to our children. We are committed to providing opportunities to learn that leave none behind, no matter where they were born, how much education their families have, what language they speak or what holidays they celebrate. We have mandated that they are entitled to highly qualified teachers and to schools that set high standards and keep close track of how they're doing. They also are entitled to the option of transferring if the school that they attend fails to deliver.

This promise relies heavily on families to hold schools accountable for their end of the bargain. While it is important for parents to support their own children's learning by helping them at home and supporting them with their teachers, they also must ask how well the school is teaching all its students and be prepared to take action when the school doesn't measure up. In short, parents must become "smart consumers" of education.

Parents need information, support and assistance to play their appointed roles, and legislation now has made more of these tools available to parents than at any time in the past. Annual report cards on school effectiveness enable families to press low-performing schools for better results. Schools must send home a written notice if a child is being taught by an unqualified teacher, so parents can demand a teacher with the right credentials. Schools that do not improve student test scores must be listed in the local paper, so that their families will insist on a better school — or demand that they be involved on the school improvement team.

In schools that get federal Title I funds, even more is provided to — and expected of — parents. Title I schools must involve parents in developing and approving parent involvement policies and school-parent compacts. Schools also must involve parents in deciding how the school will spend funds and design programs to raise student achievement. In addition, Title I schools should give parents information about the state's standards, the school's curriculum and the state test that children take every year.

While much more is asked of parents in this new era, the returns can be rich beyond calculation. Investing in parent leaders will strengthen our democracy, improve our schools, and send our children a clear message that all the adults around them both want and expect them to do well. What better way to keep America's promise to its children?

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Resource Guide

Who We Are

KSA-Plus Communications is the nation's leading firm in communicating the complexities of school improvement in clear language and powerful images and in helping education and community leaders build the public support necessary for high-achieving schools. We have worked extensively with school districts, state agencies, parent groups and community-based organizations across the country (from Philadelphia to Kansas City to Seattle) to help parents become more effective partners and advocates for better schools. KSA-Plus is based in Arlington, VA, with offices in Maryland, Oregon and Washington state.

The Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence has been the catalyst for school improvement in Kentucky for more than two decades. It created citizen demand for new policies and helped bring them about. Through its Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership (CIPL), the Prichard Committee has educated an army of parents who understand how schools need to change and who now have the leadership skills to help educators make and sustain improvements. In 2004, it began the Center for Parent Leadership to provide information and assist other organizations and communities in developing parent leaders and advocates.

Other Resources

PUBLICATIONS

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WEB SITES

Center for Law and Education
www.cleweb.org
This site contains useful legislative updates plus articles on important education issues.

Center for Parent Leadership
www.centerforparentleadership.org
The Center for Parent Leadership is the Prichard Committee's consulting and technical assistance unit. This site provides information about workshops, seminars, publications and services that help parents, through in-depth training and support, become decisionmaking partners and leaders in public schools.

Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership (CIPL)
www.cipl.org
This site offers additional information about CIPL, plus carries brief reports on CIPL projects in Kentucky schools.

Council of Chief State School Officers
www.ccsso.org
Through this site, you can link to the Web sites of every state education agency.

Education Law Center (New Jersey)
www.edlawcenter.org
This site gives information about the Law Center's program and training opportunities for parents.

The Education Trust
www.edtrust.org
This site contains useful reports on student achievement and a link to the interactive Edwatch database in achievement gaps and national achievement trends.

Institute for Education and Social Policy (IESP), New York University
www.nyu.edu/iesp
Through policy studies, research, technical assistance and evaluations, IESP builds capacity for school improvement and reform among policymakers, educators, parents, and community groups. Recent research and publications are available on the site.

Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL)
www.iel.org
IEL covers three program areas: developing and supporting leaders, strengthening school-family-community connections, and improving policies and systems that support children and youth. It houses the Coalition for Community Schools (see www.communityschools.org) and produces many useful publications on education policy and school-family-community connections.

Institute for Responsive Education (IRE)
www.responsiveeducation.org
IRE offers a range of training and technical assistance programs that provide administrators, teachers, parents, students and community members with the skills they need to develop, implement and sustain partnership initiatives that support educational improvement. The newsletter and many publications are available at the Web site.

KSA-Plus Communications
www.ksaplus.com
KSA-Plus Communications is a communications firm that specializes in K–12 education issues — in particular, helping parents become more knowledgeable and demanding school partners and helping educators understand how to work more effectively with parents. The Web site offers a variety of publications (many are free) and information about workshops, consulting and other technical assistance that is available.

National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education
www.ncpie.org
NCPIE is a coalition of major education, community, public service and advocacy organizations working to create meaningful family-school partnerships in every school in America. There are currently 248 organizations affiliated. The site has an excellent database on what these groups are doing and what they can offer.

National PTA
www.pta.org
This site includes the national standards, best practice profiles of schools that are involving parents meaningfully (sometimes as leaders) and updates on the effort to strengthen teacher education in this field.

National Network of Partnership Schools
www.csos.jhu.edu
A program of the National Center for School, Family and Community Partnerships, run by Dr. Joyce Epstein at Johns Hopkins University, the National Network of Partnership Schools brings together schools, districts and states that are committed to developing and maintaining comprehensive programs of school-family-community partnerships.

Parents for Public Schools (PPS)
www.parents4publicschools.com
PPS is a national organization of community-based chapters with a goal to attract more families to public schools. The Web site includes information about how to form a local chapter, publications and copies of PPS newsletters.

Parents United for Responsible Education (PURE)
www.pureparents.org

This Chicago organization supports parents in their efforts to be effectively engaged in schools, especially through local school councils. The site posts research-based fact sheets and other resources about what to look for in good schools and classrooms.

Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence
www.prichardcommittee.org
The Prichard Committee is a statewide citizen organization in Kentucky whose goal is to improve education for all citizens in the state. This site carries useful publications, many in PDF format for free downloading, and links to other reports and organizations.

Public Education Network
www.publiceducation.org
This site contains useful information about advocating for improved public education, such as understanding a school budget.

U.S. Department of Education:
www.ed.gov/hdb/landing.jhtml
At this site, you can get a copy of the No Child Left Behind law, policy guidance and other information.

www.ed.gov/hdb/landing.jhtml
This site contains some general information about the law for parents.

www.nces.ed.gov
This site is an excellent source of data about public education in the U.S., including the results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

Appendix: Profiles of Selected Parent Leadership Organizations

In this appendix, we describe briefly a few organizations that offer training to develop leadership among parents, families and community members. We recognize that there are many organizations that we were not able to include.

Advocates for Children (AFC)
www.advocatesforchildren.org
AFC works with the city's most impoverished and vulnerable families to secure quality and equal public education services. AFC provides a full range of services: free individual case advocacy; technical assistance; and training for parents, students and professionals about children's educational entitlements and due process rights in New York City.

AFC conducts training workshops that educate and empower thousands of parents. The workshops describe parents' and students' rights and entitlements, both in regular and special education. At "how-to" sessions, parents learn how they can participate in local school governance and to advocate on their own and others' behalf. Workshop presenters also teach parents what they need to know about the Board of Education and how it works. Workshops are held at times that are convenient to parents, on evenings and weekends, in churches, libraries and community organizations throughout the city. AFC staff are multilingual, speaking Spanish and Chinese and signing in American Sign Language.

ASPIRA
www.aspira.org
The ASPIRA Parents for Educational Excellence initiative (APEX) trains parents to become informed advocates for education in their communities. The goal is to increase the involvement of Latino parents in their children's education and to enhance their effectiveness.

APEX consists of a series of 10 workshops, available in Spanish and English, with topics that include self-esteem, why education is important, the home connection, school structure, what parent involvement means, the importance of communication, involvement with schools, organizing parent networks, group dynamics and effective facilitation. A training manual for the APEX workshop series also is available from ASPIRA.

Similarly, ASPIRA's Teachers, Organizations, and Parents for Students (TOPS) Partnership Project takes a team approach to promoting increased academic achievement and graduation rates for Latino young people. For each student, a school staff "academic coach" and parent work together to identify the student's academic and other needs, identify a plan to address them, and guide the student in a process to reach specific goals.

Boston Parent Organizing Network (BPON)
www.bpon.org
Started in 1999, BPON is composed of 35 member organizations. Its core members include the Black Ministerial Alliance (79 churches), the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, the Boston chapter of ACORN (American Communities Organizing for Reform Now), the East Boston Ecumenical Community Council and many school-parent councils. BPON's mission is to organize a diverse constituency of parents, students, family and other community members to support and advocate for the improvement of Boston Public Schools.

BPON is housed at the Institute for Responsive Education (IRE) at Northeastern University. This connection allows BPON to draw on IRE's expertise on how engaging families can improve student academic achievement.

One example of BPON's work is the High School Caucus. The Boston school system has received funding from major foundations to support high school reform. Parents heard about the funding, but they weren't seeing any changes in their children's schools. Early in 2003, BPON convened the six high school parent councils that are affiliated with BPON. (There are 14 high schools in Boston.) At this session, they formed a caucus with the express intent of having a voice in the BPS High School Renewal process.

The caucus decided that a key component of renewal should be improved relationships in high schools, especially between teachers and parents. BPON arranged for training in Parents and Teachers Talking Together, or PT3, a process developed by the Prichard Committee in Kentucky. All six high schools are planning to hold PT3 sessions, leading to the development of action plans for improving schools, developed jointly by parents and teachers.

BPON has followed up with sessions for caucus members about research and practice on high school reform, under headings like: What is good teaching? How do we know if students are learning? In addition, BPON has pushed Boston Public Schools to add a representative of the community to the five key partners working on High School Renewal.

California Tomorrow
www.californiatomorrow.org
A major goal of this organization is to strengthen the ability of families and communities to hold institutions accountable; build upon their assets; and forge alliances within and across differences in race, culture, language, age and class by working in partnership with organizations and people operating at the local level.

Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform (CCC)
www.crosscity.org
The CCC is a network of urban school reform leaders. One of its goals is to strengthen the roles of parents and community members as full school reform partners. CCC has developed a curriculum to help community groups organize parents and community

members working to improve their schools. The site includes a table of contents and a sample activity from the curriculum.

Institute for Responsive Education (IRE)
www.responsiveeducation.org
IRE houses the Boston Parent Organizing Network, plus the Parent Leadership Exchange. Both programs offer training for parent leaders. IRE also offers staff development for teachers and administrators on engaging families more effectively.

MALDEF (Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund)
www.maldef.org
MALDEF's Parent School Partnership (PSP) is a national program to train Latino parents to participate effectively in their children's academic endeavors. Many of the parents are recent immigrants who overcome language and cultural barriers as they increase their understanding of their rights, their children's rights and their responsibilities as parents. The initiative works in partnership with teachers, principals and school staff, community organizations, and the business community.

Training consists of 16 weekly workshops, presented by trainers trained by MALDEF. Topics covered by the curriculum include parents' rights, structure and function of the school and district, the politics of education, group process, accessing the media, and responsible leadership. Participants also commit to a graduation project to improve their children's schools.

Mothers on the Move (MOM)
www.mothersonthemove.org
MOM is a community organizing group active in mostly low-income, Latino neighborhoods in the South Bronx. It is run entirely by its members. Last year, MOM members conducted a series of meetings over six months to develop criteria for choosing campaigns. They chose four campaigns as top priorities: environmental justice, educational equity, quality housing and safe streets.

National Urban League
www.nul.org
(Dr. Velma Cobb 212-553-5358)
The Urban League has developed a "Standards into Practice" training workshop, a hands-on practitioners' tool to assist parents with learning and understanding education standards. Parents are learning how to use standards as tools for advocacy and judging the quality of the academic work their children get to do.

Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI)
www.cga.state.ct.us/coc/plti.htm
The 20-week PLTI reaches a diverse audience. Participants include adults raising children — mothers, fathers, grandparents, stepparents and parents. To attend, the only qualification is to care about improving systems for children. The curriculum is focused on citizenship skills that can be used to improve education and other services for families and includes:

- Understanding personal history and its impact on perceptions of leadership
- Thriving and working with diversity
- Assessing and defining problems — thinking critically
- Using the media
- Public speaking
- Using benchmarks and outcome measures
- Forming useful coalitions and building community
- Working with and how to engage the opposition
- Understanding policy and municipal budgets
- Becoming familiar with city, state and federal law.

Graduates have run for public office, designed a city parent network, established programs for grandparents raising grandchildren and produced cable TV programs. Some parents have gotten jobs for the first time or changed to better jobs. PLTI graduates have spoken on panels; testified before the state Legislature; and trained teachers, parents and administrators to become partners in school reform.

Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE)
www.PIQE.org
In California, PIQE has trained more than 300,000 parents and family members since 1987. Most of them are low-income, Latino immigrants who were not familiar with the U.S. educational system. PIQE workshops are focused on supporting children's achievement by helping children at home and collaborating with the school. The sessions are so popular that often more than 100 parents will sign up at a single school.

PIQE is founded on these basic beliefs.

- All parents love their children and want a better future for them.
- Every child can learn and deserves the opportunity to attend and complete a college education.
- Parents and teachers need to work together to ensure the educational success of every child.
- For children, learning is a natural process that parents and teachers facilitate.

The program is designed to encourage and actively support parents to assist their children at all grade levels. Parents discuss and gain skills to create a home learning environment; navigate the school system; and collaborate with teachers, counselors and principals. They also learn how to encourage college attendance and support their children's emotional and social development.

The nine-session course is offered weekly, in morning and evening sessions. Parents choose when they can come. It is taught by instructors who are trained by PIQE. Many are PIQE graduates. The initial planning session asks parents what they would like to include in the course. Topics include:

- Home/school collaboration
- The home, motivation and self-esteem
- Communication and discipline
- Drug, gangs, school and community
- How the school system functions
- College and career election

Parents for Public Schools (PPS)
www.parents4publicschools.com
PPS chapters receive a variety of support, services and technical assistance from the PPS national network. The network is based out of the PPS national office in Jackson, MS. The national office provides resources and technical assistance to local chapters.

The basic benefits for all incorporated PPS chapters include:

- An annual leadership conference and other chapter training opportunities
- Newsletters for all local and national chapter members
- Toll-free number for easy access to national resources and information
- Hot line for staff support and strategies for sustained efforts
- How-to manual for chapter formation and action guides for specific chapter activities
- Consultation on fundraising strategies, strategic planning and leadership development
- Specially designed templates for PPS communications and materials
- Site visits as needed by other chapter leaders or staff.

Southern Echo
www.southernecho.org
Southern Echo is a leadership education, training and development organization founded in 1989 and based in Jackson, MS. Echo is committed to building new, accountable grassroots leadership and organization through training, technical and legal assistance. Echo staff works with and in support of African-American and working-class community leadership and organizations in rural Mississippi and 11 other Southern states.

Echo training focuses on enabling people to develop effective skills and the working tools of community organizing. This includes the building of political skills, organizational development and policy formation at the local level. The primary goal is to build the capacity of grassroots leadership and organizations to empower their communities to fight racism. Empowerment of communities is necessary to enable people to hold the political, educational, economic and environmental systems accountable to the needs and interests of African-American and poor communities.

Echo's training curriculum covers:

Part 1: Fundamentals
Part 2: Program of Work
Part 3: Culture
Part 4: Counter-revolution
Part 5: Education

Part 6: Justice and Power
Part 7: Governmental Process
Part 8: Negotiations
Part 9: Environmental Racism
Part 10: Intensified Training
Part 11: Conflict Resolution
Part 12: Demography
Part 13: Get Out the Vote
Part 14: Strategic Planning

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