

Creating Parent, Family Action Teams for Partnerships



Getting Your Action Team Started!

Materials from *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action*
by Joyce Epstein (2009)

How Does an Action Team for Partnerships Differ From the School Improvement Team or School Council?

School councils, improvement teams, and other decision making or advisory groups identify school goals and write and oversee broad plans. School councils are agents for change that draw the big picture of school improvement and set goals for excellence. They focus on what teachers, administrators, and other school staff must do to improve curriculum, instruction, assessments, and management of the school. Most School Councils do not write detailed plans and schedules focused explicitly on family and community involvement activities (see p. 167 in Chapter 5.)

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) accounts for and takes responsibility for planning and conducting family and community involvement activities. The ATP, a committee of the School Council, reports to the council or improvement team on a regular schedule to explain how family and community connections are supporting specific school improvement goals. The ATP's reports should help the School Council see that the school is developing a welcoming, family-friendly climate and that progress is being made on partnerships each year.

For example, the School Council may identify the need for students to improve their math skills and set a goal in the School Improvement Plan to assist teachers in improving the math curriculum and instructional approaches to help students increase math skills and test scores. Families and the community also can support this goal if the ATP schedules involvement activities in the One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships that focus on math-related activities such as helping students develop positive attitudes toward math, complete math homework, and share math progress.

Can the School Council Be the Action Team for Partnerships?

If a School Council or School Improvement Team is very large, a designated subset of teachers, parents, and an administrator may *be* the Action Team for Partnerships. In most schools, however, the School Improvement Team or School Council is limited in size and has defined responsibilities for advising the principal about school goals and for overseeing all aspects of the school's program and progress.

Most School Councils need an ATP—an action arm—to plan and implement family and community involvement activities. The ATP (like any committee) reports to the School Council on a regular schedule about its progress on family and community involvement and obtains input and ideas from the Council for the annual One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships. One member of the School Council may also serve on the ATP as a *linking member* to ensure that the School Council is always aware and informed of the plans and activities for partnerships and how to support those activities.

When different people serve on the School Council and the ATP, individual leaders are protected from trying to do too many things and burning out. Also, an ATP ensures that more teachers, administrators, parents, and community partners develop leadership skills over time.

How Does the Action Team for Partnerships Differ From the PTA or PTO?

A school benefits by having an Action Team for Partnerships *and* a PTA, PTO, Home-School Association, or other parent organization. A PTA or PTO helps develop parent leaders and brings parents' voices to bear on school policies, decisions, and activities. Typically, however, a PTA or PTO does not direct the work of school administrators or teachers. In contrast, an ATP writes plans and conducts or delegates activities to organize and improve communications with all families on student learning, homework, report card grades, curriculum matters, tests and assessments, postsecondary planning, parent-teacher-student conferences, and other important school and classroom topics.

The ATP writes an annual One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships so that family and community involvement includes activities that teachers, administrators, counselors, community partners, or others conduct to help all parents understand their children's work and learning opportunities each year. This extends the PTA or PTO's agenda to ensure that the school's program of family and community involvement is officially linked to the School Improvement Plan and goals for student success. The ATP, which includes teachers and administrators, will improve connections with families about the curriculum, students' work, and students' academic and behavioral progress.

The PTA or PTO is a *parent-oriented* group. The ATP is a *student-oriented* group that mobilizes the energies, resources, and efforts of all who are interested in student success. The PTA or PTO may be purposely independent of the school. The ATP is a committee of the School Council or School Improvement Team, and the annual written plans for partnerships are an official part of and appended to the School Improvement Plan.

An officer or representative of the PTA/PTO should be a member of the Action Team for Partnerships to make sure that the two groups are working in concert. With an ATP, all partners—including the PTA or PTO and other business and community partners—can work together to support parents, students, and the school.

This *Handbook* guides schools to have *one* school improvement plan with *one* set of improvement goals, usually developed by or with the approval of the School Council or School Improvement Team. From that base, schools should have *one partnership program* to support and advance student success. This requires an annual Action Plan for Partnerships that identifies and recognizes *all* of the family and community involvement activities that will be conducted by educators, PTA or PTO, business partners, community groups, afterschool programs, and others. In this way, everyone's work on family and community involvement is accounted for and celebrated, and the school's partnership program will continue to grow and improve.

Members of the Action Team for Partnerships

- How Many?** 6-12 members
- Who?** 2-3 teachers or more
2-3 parents/family members or more
Representatives include parent liaison,
PTA/PTO officer, parents with children in
different grades, families from various
neighborhoods
Principal
1-2 students (in high school)
1-2 other members or more (e.g., nurse,
counselor, school psychologist, community
members)
- Terms?** 2-3 years (renewable)
Replacements made as members leave
At least one “linking” member also serves on the
School Improvement Team or School Council
- Leaders?** Chair or co-chairs communicate well with
educators *and* families
Others are chairs or co-chairs of ATP
committees for specific goals, types of
involvement, or planned activities
Non-team members can be designated
leaders for specific activities

All features are flexible to fit school conditions and needs.

Checklist: Are You Ready?

GETTING STARTED WITH AN ACTION TEAM FOR PARTNERSHIPS

The chair or co-chairs of the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) will guide these activities.

CHECK (✓) WHEN YOUR SCHOOL ATP HAS COMPLETED THE FOLLOWING:

- Select the members of the ATP** including 6 to 12 members, with teachers, parents, principal, and others selected for their interest in and commitment to positive school, family, and community connections.
- Identify the chair or co-chairs of the Action Team for Partnerships.**
- Select a committee structure for the ATP to focus on four school improvement goals or on the six types of involvement. Identify the chair or co-chairs of each committee.**
- Complete an inventory of present practices** for each of the six types of involvement. Discuss the inventory with teachers, parents, students, and others and obtain their ideas about partnership activities that should be maintained, improved, and added (see *Starting Points*, pp. 174–177 and CD).
- Select goals from the School Improvement Plan that would be strengthened with activities for family and community involvement.**
- Complete a One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships** specifying specific activities for each of the six types of involvement or for four school improvement goals. Include details on who is responsible for implementing the involvement activities, when the activities will be conducted, and what results are expected.
- Schedule a basic, One-Day Team-Training Workshop to complete many of the actions listed above, as guided by this Handbook (see Chapters 4 and 5).**
- Establish a schedule of monthly meetings for the full ATP**, and discuss plans for meetings of ATP committees. Select the place and time of ATP meetings, and decide how the meetings will be organized.

Decide how often and in what ways the ATP will report to the following groups:

- The School Council, School Improvement Team, or other decision making body
 - All teachers and staff
 - All parents
 - Parent organization (e.g., PTA, PTO, or other groups)
 - The community (e.g., business roundtable, local media, mayor's office)
 - District leaders, school board, other district offices
- Design and schedule a kickoff activity** to effectively convey the message to all educators, families, and students that the school is a partnership school. Introduce the Action Team for Partnerships, and help parents learn how they can be involved throughout the school year.

First ATP Meeting of the School Year

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) meets at least once a month to plan, monitor, evaluate, and improve activities. ATP committees meet as needed to prepare for specific partnership activities.

At its first meeting of the school year, the ATP must lay a strong foundation on which to build an effective partnership program. The agenda for the first meeting of the year may include the following topics, discussions, and actions.

- **Recognize the value of all team members.**
 - Express appreciation for all members' willingness to serve on the ATP.
 - Reinforce the importance of attendance at this and all meetings and events.
 - Lead an icebreaker or team-building activity to celebrate members' strengths, talents, and commitment to the work of the team.
- **Review the ATP committee structure to organize specific activities in the ATP's One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships.**
- **Select team leaders and discuss shared leadership responsibilities.**
 - Positions to be filled may include the following:
 - *Chairperson* or *co-chairs* (co-chairs are recommended) of the full ATP and of each committee
 - *Recorder* of the minutes for each meeting
 - *Liaison* or link to the School Council to report the plans and events of the ATP
 - *Liaison* or link to the PTA or PTO to include the activities of the parent organization in the ATP's One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships
 - *Promoter* or *publicist* to let teachers, other staff, families, students, and the community know of team's plans, events, and progress
 - *Other roles* as needed or desired
- **Establish a communication system.**
 - Create and distribute a phone and address list of ATP members to all members and other school leaders.
 - Set a regular schedule (dates, time, place) for meetings.
 - Establish or review the team's ground rules for communicating at meetings (see p. 110 or CD).
 - Decide how the ATP will gather input from members who are unable to attend a meeting.
 - Decide how the team will provide minutes of each meeting to absent team members.
 - Plan how the team will keep the whole school community informed of partnership plans, activities, and progress.
- **Review the One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships.**
 - Review the pages of the One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships for the school year.
 - Revise the plan as needed through the year.
- **Begin implementing the planned partnership activities.**
 - Help the appropriate ATP committees and leaders with upcoming activities:
 - Which activities are scheduled during the next month or two?
 - Which committee(s) and team members or others are in charge of these activities?
 - What needs to be done to prepare for the upcoming activities?
 - Who will help implement each activity?
 - How and when will the team evaluate the effectiveness of each activity?
- **Discuss the date, time, place, and agenda for the next ATP meeting.**

Ten Steps to Success: School-Based Programs of School, Family, and Community Partnerships

- ✓ **Create an Action Team for Partnerships.**
- ✓ **Obtain funds and official support.**
- ✓ **Provide training to all members of the Action Team for Partnerships.**
- ✓ **Identify starting points—present strengths and weaknesses.**
- ✓ **Write a One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships.**
- ✓ **Apply the framework of six types of involvement to activities linked to school improvement goals.**
- ✓ **Enlist staff, parents, students, and the community to help conduct activities.**
- ✓ **Evaluate the quality and outreach of partnership activities and results.**
- ✓ **Conduct an annual celebration to report progress to all participants.**
- ✓ **Continue working toward a comprehensive, ongoing, goal-oriented program of partnerships.**

DISTRICT LEADERSHIP ROLES

FOR SCHOOL, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Conduct some or all of the following to strengthen district partnership programs:

1. **WRITE A POLICY** that identifies district goals for partnerships, applies the six types of involvement, and recognizes the need for schools to take a team approach in developing partnership programs. Specify the district's commitments to assist schools in implementing the policy. Review and revise the policy periodically, with parent input.
2. **ASSIGN A LEADER FOR PARTNERSHIPS** to oversee the district's work on family and community involvement and to guide all schools' with their work on partnerships. In large districts, the leader will require a staff of facilitators for partnerships. (One facilitator can assist up to 30 schools in developing their partnership programs.)
3. **WRITE A LEADERSHIP ACTION PLAN FOR PARTNERSHIPS** that lists and schedules district leadership activities and direct assistance to schools.
4. **IDENTIFY A BUDGET WITH ADEQUATE FUNDS** for staff salaries and program costs. This may include funds for workshops for schools' Action Teams for Partnerships, small grants for school projects, strategies for sharing best practices, and other activities.
5. **GUIDE EACH SCHOOL TO FORM AN ACTION TEAM FOR PARTNERSHIPS (ATP)** consisting of teachers, parents, administrators, and others who will plan, implement, and evaluate the school's partnership program. The ATP, a committee of the School Council or School Improvement Team, bases plans for partnerships on school improvement goals.
6. **PROVIDE INSERVICE EDUCATION** for teachers, parents, and administrators, and conduct training workshops for schools' action teams for partnerships. Each ATP will write an annual One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships to involve all families in their children's education, linked to school improvement goals.
7. **CONDUCT AN END-OF-YEAR CELEBRATION WORKSHOP** for action teams to share best practices, discuss progress, solve problems, and plan ahead. District leaders also should recognize excellent programs and practices.
8. **DEVELOP OR SELECT TOOLS AND PRODUCTS** that schools may use or adapt to improve their partnership programs.
9. **ESTABLISH A DISTRICT WEB SITE, LIBRARY, NEWSLETTER COLUMN,** and/or other communications to disseminate materials, research, resources, and other information that will help schools' action teams improve their partnership programs. Share information on partnerships with the public and media.
10. **WORK WITH BUSINESSES AND OTHER COMMUNITY GROUPS AND ORGANIZATIONS** on partnerships to improve the curriculum and programs for students and to assist families.
11. **SUPPORT RESEARCH AND EVALUATION** to learn which practices help schools produce specific results for students, parents, teachers, the school, and the community. Organize an accountability system to document and monitor all schools' progress on partnerships.
12. **CONDUCT OTHER DISTRICT LEADERSHIP ACTIVITIES** to build strong and permanent programs of partnership at the district level and in all schools.

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Leadership and Facilitation Strategies for District and State Leaders of Partnerships

Research and fieldwork indicate that successful leaders conduct activities to organize strong partnership programs at the district and state levels *and* to facilitate the work of schools' Action Teams for Partnerships. Their efforts reflect six leadership strategies, briefly described below and detailed in the "lead and succeed" inventories in this chapter.

Create awareness. Actively promote district or state partnership programs to all key stakeholders, including teachers, administrators, families, businesses, and community groups.

Align program and policy. With support from district or state leaders, integrate the partnership plans and practices with official policies, requirements, and procedures.

Guide learning and program development. Organize, conduct, and support professional development workshops, conferences, and materials to assist district or state colleagues and schools strengthen their partnership programs.

Share knowledge. Foster ongoing communication throughout the district or state to increase knowledge about effective programs of school, family, and community partnerships and to share best practices.

Celebrate milestones. Recognize progress and excellence on partnerships at the school, district, and state levels.

Document progress and evaluate outcomes. Collect information to monitor and record activities and assess progress toward goals set in annual Leadership Action Plans for Partnerships. Help all districts and schools evaluate their practices and results of partnerships.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOLS

All schools that develop comprehensive partnership programs use the framework of six types of involvement, establish an Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), and write a One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships linked to school improvement goals. Middle and high schools also should consider the following guidelines.

Link Partnerships to School Improvement Goals

Partnership programs in middle and high schools must be goal oriented. There are many age-appropriate and context-specific goals to choose from, including improving students' writing, enhancing science skills, increasing attendance, reducing bullying, improving health, planning for postsecondary education, and developing a welcoming school environment. Use Form G–Goals to write the One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships and to evaluate progress.

Focus on Transition Years

Schools that emphasize family involvement for incoming students and their families are more likely to sustain school-family-community partnerships across the middle and high school years. For example, a high school that is just beginning its work on partnerships may want to focus on new activities for involving ninth graders' families and add activities for another grade level each year.

Promote Early Postsecondary Planning

Early and consistent emphases on postsecondary planning will ensure that more students set and reach goals to attend college or prepare for training or work after high school. Middle and high schools' ATPs should create a sequence of information and activities from Grade 6 to 12 to help students and families set long-term education goals, identify academic and financial requirements, and take action to attain the goals. Partnership activities may include workshops, informative flyers, articles in newsletters, interactive homework on setting goals for education and careers, field trips, panel discussions with alumni, and other targeted activities.

Actively Involve Students

Students are the main actors in their own education. Students need to be involved in school, family, and community partnership activities by delivering and interpreting information to and from their families and by providing ideas and reactions for improving involvement activities. In high schools, one or two students must be members of the ATP. Adolescents need to know that their schools and families are working together to help students succeed in school. Ironically, studies indicate that adolescents develop greater independence when their parents are knowledgeable partners in their education.

Reach Out to Families

Just about all parents of middle and high school students want to know how to help their children at home and how to help them succeed at school. Studies confirm that adolescents' families need and want more and better information and guidance from middle and high schools. Studies also show that when schools implement well-planned practices of partnership, more families become involved in those activities.

Expand Teachers' Roles Gradually

Because many middle and high school teachers were trained as academic specialists, they may not be aware of how family and community involvement helps adolescents succeed. ATPs may start by implementing partnership activities that produce important and visible results for students and the school. ATPs may encourage teachers who already conduct partnership activities to share their success stories and recruit colleagues to implement similar activities.

WHY PARTNERSHIPS ARE IMPORTANT IN MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOLS

Research shows that

- **Students tend to do better on achievement tests, report card grades, attendance, behavior, and postsecondary plans if their parents are involved in their education.**
- **Adolescents are more likely to avoid risky or negative behaviors (e.g., alcohol or drug abuse, violence) if they feel connected to their families.**
- **Partnership activities can help create safer schools.**
- **Curriculum-related family involvement, such as interactive homework, can help students improve academic skills in specific subjects.**
- **High-performing middle and high schools inform and involve parents and community partners as a planned part of their programs.**
- **Parents want to be involved and influential in their teens' education.**
- **Students in middle and high schools want their parents involved in meaningful ways.**
- **When schools reach out to involve families, more parents become involved.**

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ONE-YEAR ACTION PLAN FOR PARTNERSHIPS (SCHOOL LEVEL, FORM G-GOALS)

SCHEDULE OF SCHOOL, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS TO REACH SCHOOL GOALS

On this 4-page plan, select 2 academic goals, 1 behavioral goal, and 1 goal for sustaining a partnership climate. For each goal, outline the desired results, how results will be measured, what family and community involvement activities will be implemented, dates, responsibilities, and needed resources.

School:	School Year:				
GOAL 1-ACADEMIC: (Select ONE curricular goal for students from the School Improvement Plan, such as improving reading, math, writing, science, or other skills.)					
Goal 1 chair or co-chairs:					
Desired result(s) for THIS goal:			How will the school measure the result(s)?		
Organize and schedule family and community involvement activities to support THIS goal.					
ACTIVITIES (2 or more, continuing or new)	TYPE (1-6)	DATE OF ACTIVITY	GRADE LEVEL(S)	WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE FOR EACH ACTIVITY & WHEN	PERSONS IN CHARGE AND HELPING
Note if funds, supplies, or resources are needed for these activities.					
Add pages to outline more activities that support THIS goal.					

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Note if funds, supplies, or resources are needed for these activities.					

Add pages to outline more activities that support THIS goal.

HELP!! THIS PAGE HAS SOME PROBLEMS. CAN YOU FIND THEM?
ONE-YEAR ACTION PLAN
SCHEDULE OF SCHOOL, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS TO REACH SCHOOL GOALS

School: XYZ Elementary School		School Year: 20xx-20yy			
GOAL 1-- ACADEMIC: (Select ONE curricular goal for students, such as improving reading, math, writing, science, or other skills that the school will address in the next school year.) Increase families' understanding of their students' reading abilities.					
Desired result(s) for THIS goal: Students will increase their scores on the State Test.		How will you measure the result(s)? Review the state standardized test scores.			
Organize and schedule family and community involvement activities to support THIS goal.					
ACTIVITIES (2 or more, continuing or new)	TYPE (1-6)	DATES OF ACTIVITIES	GRADE LEVEL(S)	WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE FOR EACH ACTIVITY & WHEN?	PERSONS IN CHARGE AND HELPING
Family and community volunteers will mentor students in the after-school program (Continuing).	3,6	All year	Grade 4-5	Recruit & train mentors (Fall) Match mentors with students (Fall) Inform parents about the program (Fall) Implement and monitor (Fall thru Spring)	Mrs. Smith & Mr. Lyons
Read-a-thon for students to read 100 minutes. Parents will sign that they know child has read (continuing).	1,4	January	All	Connect with the media center for a kick-off event (December). Send reading logs home (January). Announce top readers on the PA weekly (Jan.) Celebration in the media center (Feb. 1)	Mrs. Smith & Miss Garcia
Fifth grade students will be reading partners for third grade students. Two days per week for twenty minutes before end of the day. Parents will be informed about the program. (new)	3, 2	All year	3 rd & 5 th grades	Teachers will pair students (Oct.) Students will read together as scheduled. Include an article in school newsletter to inform parents about the program (March). Party to celebrate (May).	Mrs. Smith & Ms. Sands
Family Literacy Night to celebrate Dr. Seuss' birthday.	2, 4	March	All	Organize guest readers and solicit donations and refreshments from CBO's. (Jan) Decorate the school for theme. (March) Send fliers home to parents. (March)	Mrs. Smith & Ms. Garcia
Any extra funds, supplies, or resources needed for these activities? Seek donations from community businesses and organizations. Solicit from PTA.					

“The results highlight the consistency of the impact of parental involvement across racial and ethnic groups, parent involvement raised achievement and produced positive outcomes across the board.”

- 2005, Jeynes

“We found that schools would need to increase per-pupil spending by more than \$1,000 in order to achieve the same results that are gained with parental involvement”

- 2008, Conway & Houtenville

“Some teams enter short periods when individuals or subgroups seem to be *storming* with each other. If the ATP’s charge is unclear... members may be uncertain about why they are on the team. ... These concerns can be minimized or even eliminated if the ATP writes the One-Year Action Plan with innovative, productive and and enjoyable activities that support the goals.”

- 2009, Epstein

“When members understand the team’s goals, know their own and others’ responsibilities and talents, and agree on the rules for interaction and cooperation, an ATP can become a high-performing leadership committee for the school.”

- 2009, Epstein

“The school is already conducting some family involvement activities. How can we take stock of the activities that are being done at particular grade levels, and that are being conducted by various groups schoolwide?”

- 2009, Epstein

“The school is implementing its One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships. How will our ATP know if we are making progress?”

- 2009, Epstein