

Get Started



The world is changing rapidly. More and more jobs require education beyond high school. More and more jobs require an ability to use technology. To be successful in the workplace and in life, students must develop the ability to learn new skills and to adapt to new situations. Academic standards reflect these new demands. Standards are written statements that say what a child is supposed to do and learn at each grade level and how the child should demonstrate that learning. All across the country, schools, school districts, and states are setting high academic standards and high expectations for all students so that they can be successful in school and in life.

High academic standards and high expectations

It is important to understand how academic standards and the compact work together to improve student learning and increase student achievement. The new Title I legislation introduces substantial changes to strengthen learning in a schoolwide program. A central focus of the new law is its emphasis on teaching and learning to high standards set by states and local schools. The standards are a guideline for teaching and learning. Remediation through completing worksheets and through drill and practice is not enough: students must be able to apply what they learn to the world around them.

Results from recent international comparisons of students' achievement in math

and science and student success on college entrance tests (SATs and ACTs) show that taking rigorous courses is a strong predictor of high achievement. Setting high standards is the first step to both rigorous course work and high achievement. Consider your standards as you develop a compact. Standards help parents answer questions such as: "What is it that my child should know?" and "Is my child learning?"

Challenging standards:

- Give teachers and parents the common language that they need to be an effective team;
- Make sure everyone knows exactly what children are expected to learn; and
- Help the team of teachers, students, and families work toward the same goals.

When the goals are clear, teachers can apply the most effective teaching strategies, and parents can continue the learning at home in simple and enjoyable ways. Standards provide a measure of performance that assesses student work against what *all* students should know and be able to do instead of comparing students to one another. For some students, it may take more time, extra help, and greater effort, yet every student can successfully learn and achieve to higher academic standards.

Content standards

Content standards establish learning priorities by grade level. Standards ensure that the basic concepts and skills being taught in one class will be the same ones being taught in another class across town. They need not be taught by the same methods or by using the same topics. For example, Miss Garcia may ask her fourth-grade class to observe and describe the physical characteristics of the local neighborhood using charts organized by physical features (trees, hills, roads, and the like). Mr. Parsons might ask his class to break up into small groups and construct physical models of the neighborhood. Both teachers are teaching the essential elements of geography.

When the children are tested, both classes need to be able to meet the standard, found in their geography test, of being able to describe the physical characteristics of locales (terrain, climate, weather, and so forth) even though the classes learned this information in different ways.

The following example is a selection of the content standards for third-grade language arts used at Signal Hill Elementary School in Long Beach, California.

A fluent third-grade reader:

- Increases vocabulary by understanding concepts such as synonyms, antonyms, and homonyms.
- Recognizes root words, prefixes, and suffixes.
- Demonstrates literal comprehension by recalling details and sequencing events.
- Identifies the main idea, recognizes cause/effect relationships, makes inferences and predictions from reading selections, and draws conclusions from the overall meaning of a selection.

Performance standards

Performance standards allow us to evaluate student work against what students should be learning as identified by parents, citizens, and educators in their states and communities. Consistent standards allow Miss Garcia's and Mr. Parsons' fourth-grade students to be judged against the same set of rules—the same set of standards of what students are expected to know. If children in both classes correctly answer 18 out of 20 questions on their test, both teachers agree that their students have mastered the material.

Once families, teachers, and students understand what students are expected to learn, it is important to assess how well students are meeting the content standards. Kentucky has developed the following performance levels to help teachers and families monitor, assist, and encourage student progress towards higher academic standards.

Distinguished

- The student completes all important components of the task and communicates ideas clearly.
- The student demonstrates an in-depth understanding of the relevant concepts and/or process.
- Where appropriate, the student offers insightful interpretations or extensions (generalizations, applications, and analogies).

Proficient

- The student completes most important components of the task and communicates clearly.
- The student demonstrates understanding of major concepts even though he/she overlooks or misunderstands some less important ideas or details.

Apprentice

- The student completes some important components of the task and communicates those clearly.

- The student demonstrates that there are gaps in his/her conceptual understanding.

Novice

- The student shows minimal understanding.
- The student is unable to generate strategy. Answers may display only recall effect, lack clear communication and/or be totally incorrect or irrelevant.

National checkpoints of progress

Many state academic standards are based on current research, which connects these standards to national measures of success. A new American consensus on education has developed about what is needed to prepare our young people for the coming times. Widely accepted and used among national policymakers and practitioners, the following checkpoints of student progress stem from research that identifies certain points of student growth to be particularly critical transition periods.

- **Every child in America is reading well and independently by the end of third grade.** If children are not able to read independently by the end of the third grade, their ability to succeed in school is in jeopardy. Research shows that it is hard to catch up, and that falling behind in early reading is a strong predictor of dropping out of school. In America, 40 percent of fourth-graders do not meet basic levels for reading achievement on the National Assessment of Educational Progress.
- **Every child in America is competent in math, including algebra at the eighth grade.** American eighth-graders scored above the international average in science and below the international average in math on the Third International Assessment of Math and Science. Because of this test, we now know what it takes to be competitive

both nationally and internationally in math and science by the eighth grade. Competency in algebra and in science at the eighth grade is pivotal because of the “gate keeper” action of the courses: if students learn the math and science material early, they will be ready to take the sequence of courses in high school that prepares them for college and for careers.

- **Every 18-year-old in America is prepared academically and financially for college.** Over half of the new jobs created in the past three years are managerial and professional jobs requiring higher-level skills. Students must be prepared academically to take advantage of these career options. They need to take rigorous academic classes, and they need access to Advanced Placement and Tech-Prep courses. Advanced Placement courses and tests reflect national standards of excellence across America that help high school students prepare to enter and succeed in college.

Taking stock of standards at your school

The Education Excellence Partnership² is a group of major organizations that have teamed up to promote high academic standards and high expectations for all students. Together, they have developed the following set of questions related to academic standards at the local school level. These questions reflect the kind of information the school, its students and their families, and the community at large need to help all children achieve. If your compact is working well, each of your partners—parents, teachers, principals, concerned community members, and others—should be able to answer these questions or to know how to access the information easily. Think about how the compact will help you provide answers to these and other questions you have about your school.

1. What skills and knowledge will the students be expected to master this year?

- What are students expected to learn this year in key subjects like math, science, history, and English?
- Are there challenging academic standards in place at this school, and how do they compare with those in other school districts?
- How do teachers inform students about the academic standards they're expected to meet?
- What kinds of projects and assignments are in place to help students meet higher academic standards?

2. How will students be evaluated?

- What kind of information do teachers use to evaluate students' learning and the extent to which students are academically ready to move on to the next grade?
- How are grades determined in the classroom?
- Will students be able to take new national tests in fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade math when they become available in 1999?

3. What can families do to stay more involved in their children's academic progress?

- What can families do at home to complement what is happening in the classroom?
- How can families know on a daily basis what homework has been assigned?
- How can families support teachers' efforts in implementing higher academic standards?

4. How does the school accommodate differences in learning?

- What if a student is a slow learner and falls behind, or is a fast learner and is bored?
- Are summer school, tutoring, or other programs available for students who need more help?

5. How are students prepared for further learning after high school?

- What learning opportunities exist outside the classroom to make learning more relevant to what happens in the real world?
- Are children encouraged to think about a wide variety of career interests?
- Are all students encouraged to take algebra by the end of eighth grade?

²The Education Excellence Partnership comprises the Business Roundtable, U.S. Department of Education, American Federation of Teachers, National Alliance of Business, National Education Association, National Governors' Association, and U.S. Chamber of Commerce. The questions are adapted from *Strengthening your child's future*, a booklet for parents about academic standards (1997). For a copy, call 1-800-382-3762.

Get Started

Activity Sheet A: Taking Stock of Standards

Directions: Use the sets of questions developed by the Education Excellence Partnership as an opening discussion to help the compact team make a quick assessment of your school. Refer back to the previous page for more questions to consider within each category listed below.

Categories of questions from the Education Excellence Partnership's brochure, <i>Strengthening your child's academic future</i>.	Do families have the information necessary to answer the question?	Do teachers and school staff have the information necessary to answer the question?	What commitments need to be included in the compact to ensure that families, teachers, and school staff can answer the question?
1. What skills and knowledge will the students be expected to master this year?			
2. How will students be evaluated?			
3. What can families do to stay more involved in their children's academic progress?			
4. How does the school accommodate differences in learning?			
5. How are students prepared for further learning after high school?			



**In a 1995 Phi Delta
Kappa/Gallup poll,
89 percent of parents
indicated their willingness
to sign a “contract” or
a compact stating the mutual
responsibilities
of the school, the
parents, and the student.**



Write the Compact



The shared responsibilities of the compact

Parents, teachers, schools, and communities all want to know more about how they can help students succeed in school and in life. The compact can help achieve this aim to learn more in order to do more. Research confirms what many parents and educational experts identify as critical for school improvement and student success:

- Shared responsibility for student learning and high achievement;
- Shared responsibility for effective, frequent communication between school and home; and
- Shared responsibility for building capacity for the family-school-community partnership through volunteering and training.

Shared responsibility for student learning and high achievement

An effective partnership recognizes that a team can accomplish together what each partner could not accomplish alone. That's why it is important for a family-school partnership to connect learning at school and learning at home. In addition, it is just as important that schools and families recognize and actively work to eliminate the obstacles that prevent or disrupt learning, such as drugs, violence, and inadequate educational technology. An effective partnership for learning works to:

- Set high standards and high expectations;
- Provide and support sound instruction;
- Make schools safe and drug free; and
- Apply modern technology.

The Signal Hill Elementary School compact in the introduction illustrates the shared responsibility to help all children learn to high standards:

Signal Hill School agrees to offer a rigorous and challenging academic program and, more specifically, an accelerated math and science program. The school also agrees to provide extended learning opportunities and to assign meaningful homework, with an emphasis on writing in all content areas.

Signal Hill parents agree to monitor homework completion and to send students to school prepared to learn and on time. Parents also agree to support learning at home by reading with their children every night.

Shared responsibility for effective, frequent communication between school and home

Effective schools recognize that positive attitudes lead to positive communication. First, there has to be mutual agreement that parents and teachers need to communicate. Parents often feel that educators talk down to them or speak in educational jargon they do not understand. And teachers often feel that parents need to talk more about education with their children. Maintaining effective, frequent communication among families, schools, and students in a language everyone can understand is essential to building partnerships.

The Signal Hill Elementary School compact illustrates the shared responsibility to communicate effectively and frequently between home and school:

Signal Hill School agrees to communicate frequently with families about student progress.

Signal Hill parents agree to attend at least one parent-teacher conference a year.

The Signal Hill Elementary School compact illustrates the shared responsibility to build capacity through volunteering and training:

Signal Hill School agrees to involve parents in school governance.

Signal Hill parents agree to volunteer at least ten hours a year at the school.

Shared responsibility for building capacity through volunteering and training

Building capacity means helping school staff, teachers, and families develop the skills, motivation, and opportunities to work together to improve student learning. Few teachers ever receive formal training in working with families. Similarly, research shows that many parents want to help their children learn but are not sure what to do. Training and time spent engaged—these are the ingredients that build and strengthen partnerships on behalf of children’s learning.

Communities too are rich in untapped resources that can benefit children. When families and community members volunteer their time and talent in the schools, both schools and students increase their capacity to do more and to do it better.



Using the framework of shared responsibility

In a recent survey, 79 percent of parents reported that they want to learn more about how to be involved in their children's learning. Seventy-seven percent of parents said they believed teachers could learn more about involving them in their children's learning.

The compact is an opportunity for all partners to accept the responsibility for helping children learn. Based on the compact framework, the matrix that follows offers some examples of what you can include in your compact. Notice how the commitments of each partner complement and build on one another. The compact will help all partners work together in a coordinated effort to improve student learning.

Think about how you will get students involved in the compact. The sample items in the framework may give you some ideas. Making students full partners in the compact sends a strong message to them about the importance of education and their responsibility to be active participants in learning. See Appendix B for more information about how the community can join the compact.

Following the matrix is *Activity Sheet B: Make Your Commitment*. Use this activity sheet to record the shared responsibilities of the compact partners. While your compact team may use some of the sample commitments in the matrix, your school's compact will contain shared responsibilities that reflect the unique requirements and goals of the school.

The National PTA Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs

The National PTA has developed a set of standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs, which may be useful to your compact team as you think about the framework of shared responsibilities. Families and schools each have a part to play in meeting these standards.

Standard I: Communicating—Communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful.

Standard II: Parenting—Parenting skills are promoted and supported.

Standard III: Student learning—Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.

Standard IV: Volunteering—Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought.

Standard V: School decision making and advocacy—Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families.

Standard VI: Collaborating with community—Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families, and student learning.



Shared responsibility for student learning and high achievement

As a school, we will

As a family, we will

Set high standards and high expectations

Expect students not only to learn the basics but also to take more rigorous courses in order to reach their individual potential while preparing for college or for careers.

Work with the school and our child to plan a rigorous academic program.

Discuss with our child the importance of working hard to get the most out of school.

Discover my own unique abilities by taking challenging courses.

Recognize and do the hard work it takes to be successful in school.

Provide and support sound instruction

Assign meaningful homework with clear directions and return it promptly with comments.

Offer special assistance and appropriate time to students who progress at different rates.

Monitor our child's progress and supervise completion of homework.

Read at home together or encourage our child to read at least 30 minutes a day.

Attend school regularly, ready to learn with homework completed.

Use my free time wisely by reading for pleasure and by joining in cultural, recreational, and learning activities.

Make schools safe and drug free

Set firm and fair safety, discipline, and drug enforcement policies.

Talk with our child about the dangers of alcohol, drugs, and weapons.

Serve as a role model to my peers by honoring the school discipline codes.

Apply modern technology

Make the use of computers and Internet a routine part of instruction, reinforcing lessons and skills while enabling students to become technologically literate.

Find ways to give our children access to technology in school and after school to gain the necessary skills to succeed in school and in the workplace.

Learn to use computers and the Internet to help me do well in school.

Share my knowledge of computers and the Internet with my peers and my family.

As a school, we will	As a family, we will	As a student, I will
<input type="checkbox"/> Communicate with families frequently at convenient times and locations. <input type="checkbox"/> Inform students, families, and the community about the high academic standards at our school and how they can help students learn to these standards. <input type="checkbox"/> Make the school a friendly place for parents to meet and talk. <input type="checkbox"/> Give families timely reports on student progress and on the school's overall performance. <input type="checkbox"/> Widely disseminate information on financial aid opportunities to help students pay for college. <input type="checkbox"/> _____ _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Attend back-to-school events and parent-teacher conferences. <input type="checkbox"/> Ask questions about standards and other areas of concern at the school, so that we can help support the school's mission. <input type="checkbox"/> Be champions of the school, expressing our public support and working for school modernization, the use of technology, and the ongoing professional development of teachers. <input type="checkbox"/> Secure the school's help in preparing our child for college academically and financially. <input type="checkbox"/> _____ _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Talk to my family about what I am learning and doing in school, my interests, and my plans for the future. <input type="checkbox"/> Seek assistance from my teacher when I have problems with my schoolwork. <input type="checkbox"/> _____ _____

Shared responsibility for building capacity through volunteering and training

As a school, we will	As a family, we will	As a student, I will
<input type="checkbox"/> Support Title I requirements to get families involved in school decisions. <input type="checkbox"/> Create opportunities for all families to volunteer in the classroom, after school, and in other capacities, and encourage them to do so. <input type="checkbox"/> Provide guidance to parents on helping their children with homework and on learning at home. <input type="checkbox"/> Give staff and teachers the training to work effectively in partnership with families. <input type="checkbox"/> _____ _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Volunteer for at least one event each semester, whether it be student monitoring, tutoring, or support for special activities, such as arts programs, science fairs, sporting events, or field trips. <input type="checkbox"/> Help make the school a safe haven with computer and homework centers that operate after school. <input type="checkbox"/> Participate in school decisions by attending meetings and by serving on advisory councils. <input type="checkbox"/> _____ _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Volunteer to share my talents by tutoring or mentoring other students (for example, serving as a reading partner for a younger student). <input type="checkbox"/> Get involved in service projects that benefit my school and my community. <input type="checkbox"/> _____ _____

2 Write the Compact

Activity Sheet B: Make Your Commitment

Directions: The school, families, students, and the community all have different shared responsibilities in the compact. Make copies of this worksheet, so the compact team can record the commitments of each group separately. Based on these worksheets, you can compile the responsibilities into one document.

The school family student community
agrees to the following shared responsibilities in the compact:

Shared responsibilities for student learning and high achievement

- _____

- _____

- _____

Shared responsibility for communication

- _____

- _____

- _____

Shared responsibility for building capacity through volunteering and training

- _____

- _____

- _____

Use Your School's Compact

3

Using your compact is the critical step that moves the compact from planning to action, from paper to partnership. First, people need to know about the compact—what it is and how they can get involved. Launching the compact is a great opportunity to create new partnerships and to reach out to families and community members who have not been involved at the school before.

One of the biggest challenges will be keeping people's attention on the compact once you launch it. Your compact partners will need constant reminders of how their daily activities—whether helping a student with homework or attending a meeting at school— fulfill the commitments in the compact.

Get the word out

Today, everyone is overwhelmed with information, and many people have trouble listening to any message closely. *Experts say that it often takes eight reminders or notices for someone to say finally, "I've heard of that."*

When spreading the word about the compact and encouraging people to support it, be patient: you can count on having to remind people many times. Identify and seek out those in the school community who need to endorse the compact to make it work: teachers, school staff, parents, students, professionals and business people, the superintendent, the school board, the mayor, and others. Keep track of how many times you disseminate information about the compact and how you do it, so that you can pinpoint the most successful means of communicating the message of shared responsibility. Remind your partners that the compact is more than a

piece of paper, that it is an action plan for student success and school improvement.

Here are some ways to publicize the compact:

- Include the compact in the school newsletter.
- Send home copies with students.
- Attach it to the weekly lunch menu.
- Create a Web site where people can share what they are doing to support a partnership for learning.
- Send e-mail messages to parents, employers, and other community organizations about how they can get involved.
- Start a listserv for compact partners.
- Add information about the compact partnership to the school's voice-mail system.
- Send out a mailing to the community.
- Print the compact in the local newspaper.
- Get the community involved through neighborhood get-togethers.
- Do a speaking tour of local groups and community organizations.
- Host a special event on the compact in conjunction with parent-teacher conferences.
- Make the compact the focus of your back-to-school night.

Your compact can be as far-reaching as you would like. Whatever you choose to do, link the compact to action so that families, school staff, and the community see how the compact can work to make things happen in your school.

Provide the necessary support

Your compact is an evolving plan. It is important to decide each year how to support it. One way to ensure that the compact is used is to make it part of your school's annual plan—supported by financial resources. Allocating resources makes a strong statement about a school's priorities and its commitment to family involvement.

What do you need to make the compact work?

- **Funding:** Title I funds³, parent organization fundraiser profits, district funds, financial support through community and business partnerships.
- **Training** for teachers and school staff, including release time.
- **Resources for parents:** workshops, mailings, a newsletter, a parent library, a parent coordinator.
- **Communications technology:** a homework help line, an interactive voice mail system, an informational phone tree, a Web site.

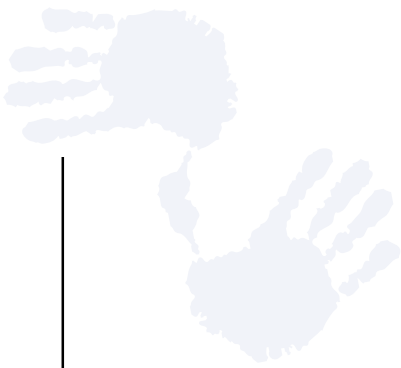
Put your compact into action

The most important and most effective way to get the word out about the compact is to use it in all parts of your school program. Make the compact an integral point of reference for all that you do at your school. In this way, all partners will understand how their commitments and their actions contribute to improved student learning and high achievement for all students. Here are some ways you can make your compact count.

Use the compact to:

- Discuss student progress during parent-teacher conferences.
- Explain the school's high academic standards and high expectations for all students.
- Help launch programs for family involvement.
- Support training for teachers and other staff to work effectively with families.
- Complement school improvement plans.
- Help partners discuss their responsibilities in meeting the goals of the school.

Activity Sheet C: Check Your Pulse will help you think about how to use the compact. While the questions will be useful as your compact gets off the ground, you can return to them periodically to check on how well the compact is working. Use the questions in a focus group discussion. It's a great opportunity to get a variety of people involved. Each partner brings a different perspective and new ideas for using the compact.



³All school districts are now required to reserve "not less" than 1 percent of the Title I funds received (unless this amount is \$5,000 or less) to support these activities, including family literacy and parenting classes. In addition, school districts, at their own discretion or at the request of constituents, may provide more than the minimum funds for these activities.

Use Your School's Compact

Activity Sheet C: Check Your Pulse

Directions: Ask a variety of compact partners to answer these questions to see how well the compact is working.

✓ Are your staff, family, and students aware that the compact exists?

✓ Do they know their commitments under the compact and are they fulfilling them?

✓ Is the compact used frequently in parent-teacher meetings and in other ways?

✓ How do parents, teachers, community members, and students most often use the compact?

✓ Are resources, including those from Title I, designated to help achieve the aims of your compact? How much? Are there any other possible resources available?

✓ Does your school community feel that the compact is a reasonably balanced statement of mutual responsibilities for student learning and school performance?

✓ Are there any new initiatives in the school, community, or district that could link with your compact to strengthen its impact?

Notes



Evaluate the Results of the Compact

4

After you get your compact up and running, the next question is: “How do you know whether or not your compact is working?” Many times, when we make a change, we are eager to see the results immediately. With the compact, you can chart long-term changes and improvements. That’s why evaluation is so important. Evaluation can show you important continuous improvement.

Evaluation also sends a signal that your school is serious about making its family-school compact work. You need to know more than whether a compact is in place. You need to know more than whether it’s working. You need to know *what’s* working. Evaluation will help you pinpoint your progress. Your school needs this information to help all members of the partnership—schools, families, students, and community members—reach their potential.

Data can be a powerful catalyst for change. When Milwaukee Public Schools instituted a new math assessment that required students to apply math concepts, think analytically, and show their work, 70 percent of the first high school students to take the test failed. Instead of just blaming the test, some school and community leaders shouldered the responsibility. Teachers began changing their classroom habits. High schools started after-school and Saturday tutoring sessions in math. Churches and businesses donated school supplies and volunteered tutors. Attendance at PTA meetings rose. With that kind of support and coordinated effort, more than 80 percent of the next Milwaukee high school class to take the test passed it.

Indicators of success

You don’t have to be a professor or a statistician to use and understand data. The following tables display three useful indicators you can use—namely, continuous improvement, comparative performance, and absolute performance.

Continuous improvement marks the progress of doing better than before. Although schools start at different levels of achievement, all can set a goal of improvement. Improvement requires having a baseline and comparing information over time. This chart shows a steady increase or continuous improvement between 1990 and 1996 in the number of fourth-graders in the United States who perform at the basic level or above in math.

Comparative performance shows whether you are doing as well as or better than other schools. Some common forms of comparison are (1) with schools in your state or in the whole country that serve children from families with similar characteristics, such as similar income level; (2) with schools of similar size; or (3) with schools located in similar settings—urban, suburban, or rural. You can use the results of the comparison to gauge your own school’s relative performance. This chart benchmarks regions against one another and against the nationwide average for fourth-grade reading achievement.

Chart Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress, 1996.

Step 4

Absolute performance indicates whether you're doing as well as or better than your school's desired level of performance. This chart shows what the national goal of all children reading at the basic level or above is and how fourth-graders in 1994 compared with this goal.

How to get data

To initiate your evaluation process, you will need to collect “baseline” information—information on how your school is doing now. This information provides a starting point from which to measure your progress. To do this, you'll need to consult current and various sources of information that report the results you've agreed to measure. No one source will give you all the information you need. Some possible sources of data include:

School profiles. The new Title I law requires the creation of school profiles so that parents and members of the community know how well your school is performing in areas such as student achievement, support for learning at school and outside school, communication, and training.

Administrative records. Using existing records is time- and cost-effective because much information is routinely collected through normal recordkeeping (for example, records of student test scores, student absenteeism and attendance, family attendance at school events, and disciplinary actions). Such data, however, may not be the most appropriate for current needs. To prevent errors, be sure to review records for completeness and accuracy.

Surveys. You can survey school staff, families, and students on their perceptions and experiences—information that is critical to the success of the compact. Make sure that your survey responses are representative

and that you have an adequate completion rate (professional surveys aim for 7 responses out of every 10 questions asked or a 70 percent response rate). You may want to ask the central district office to collect the information so that you can guarantee anonymity to survey participants.

Focus groups. Schools and organizations use these small group discussion sessions to test family involvement materials—pamphlets, videos, parent handbooks—for potential use and to explore issues in depth, such as barriers to family involvement. Focus groups can provide greater insight into your areas of concern, uncovering the reasons and motivations behind the numerical data you collect. It may be difficult, however, to find a representative group of participants who can give you the information you need.

Lessons for using data*

Use the process of collecting and analyzing data to bring educators and community members together.

Use data to focus attention and community action on real, not assumed, problems.

Beware of a picture painted in a single stroke. No single piece of information can provide enough information to understand how to change schools. A combination of well-selected indicators is essential to painting a complete picture of the needs of students or the status of school performance.

Beware of data that mask achievement gaps. Attending to achievement gaps and disparities between groups of students requires data that are broken down by race, ethnicity, income, and proficiency with English. While it is sometimes difficult to

Chart Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress, 1994.

get this kind of data, the importance of such data makes the effort worthwhile.

Report local data strategically. Once the data are analyzed, identify the problem you want to highlight and then report only the data relevant to that problem and its solution. Too many numbers can overwhelm and confuse your intended audience.

Double-check data . . . then check data again. Data-driven change can be misdirected, and reform efforts can collapse if the data are inaccurate. Even a simple typographical error can undermine months of hard work and planning. Have a team of data checkers comb through data before you report or use the data in decision making.

Keep data simple but exciting. Data that are communicated in clear and accessible terms are powerful tools for engaging the support of the community for school improvement.

Collect and use your own data

Agree on the results to measure. Because measurement takes resources and time, you may not want to measure all aspects of your compact each year. Identify for formal measurement those areas of student achievement and of the compact that your team believes are critical to the success of the school and its students at present. The two basic questions to answer are as follows:

- **Are students learning to high academic standards?**
- **Has the fulfillment of compact commitments helped to improve student learning?**

It's not enough to look at whether the compact commitments are being fulfilled. If students are not learning and achieving

to high academic standards, compact partners need to rethink the nature of their commitments. To answer these questions, you need two kinds of data—data on student performance and data on key indicators of success.

Student performance

If the core of the compact is student learning, the focus of your evaluation should be student achievement.

You need to know how well students perform on assessments in reading, math, science, and other core subjects. The school profile may include this information. If not, the school or the district should be able to provide the data to the compact team.

Activity Sheet D: Student Performance will help you record and use student performance results. Use the techniques found in the earlier tables to interpret the data. Here are some key questions to ask about student performance with reference to the indicators of success:

Continuous improvement: Do the student performance results show continuous improvement? How does performance this year compare with that in previous years?

Comparative performance: How do the student performance results at your school compare with the data for other schools in the district? With the statewide average? With the national averages?

Absolute performance: What do the student performance results show in relation to your school's desired level of performance? How far is the school from its current goals?

* Adapted from the Education Trust's *Community Data Guide* (1997).

Always disaggregate your data

Disaggregation shows how different populations in your school are doing. Disaggregating data will help you target your efforts toward those who most need your help. This chart disaggregates by parents' education level. It shows that a greater percentage of students whose parents have a college education read at the basic level or above. Depending on your needs or concerns, you may disaggregate by this or other means, such as gender, race, ethnicity, and family income.

Chart Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress, 1994.

Notes

Step 4



4 Evaluating the results of the compact

Activity Sheet D: Student Performance

Directions: Record student performance data in the first column, and use the second column to interpret the data by comparing them to national, state, and local averages and to other schools' results. Make notes on areas of strength and weakness in the third column.

State and local measures			
	Current performance	Benchmark against <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • national averages • state averages • other district schools 	What are the school's strengths and weaknesses?
English/Language arts			
Math			
Science			
Other (e.g. art and music, civics, foreign language, geography, history, occupational skills)			

National measures			
Reading well and independently by the end of third grade		60 percent of fourth-grade students nationally read at or above the basic level (NAEP, 1994).	
On track to take algebra in the eighth grade		20 percent of eighth-grade students nationally reported taking algebra (NAEP, 1992).	
Taking courses that will prepare students for college entrance and for the workplace (for example, Advanced Placement, Tech-Prep, and School-to-Career opportunities)		With increased participation in Advanced Placement (AP) courses, the number of AP exams with a score at 3 or above has tripled since 1982 (College Board, 1996).	

Evaluating the results of the compact

Activity Sheet E: Key Indicators

Once the team has assessed current student performance, consider the factors that affect this performance—these factors become the shared responsibilities in the compact. This activity sheet will help you assess how well your compact partners are fulfilling their commitments and how well those commitments are succeeding in improving student learning and helping all children achieve. The key indicators will give you an idea of the kinds of data you need to gather to pinpoint areas of strength and weakness that are affecting student performance.

Directions: Based on your school’s priorities and the data you have collected, fill in the appropriate blanks. Add your own indicators to a separate table.

Shared responsibility for student learning and high achievement		
Schools	Families	Students
Setting high standards and high expectations		
Standards: _____ % of families report that they are informed about what the school’s standards are and what is required of students.	_____ % of families and _____ % of teachers report that families have high expectations of their children and expect them to do their best.	_____ % of teachers report that students are highly motivated, that they ask questions to clarify what is expected of them, and that they seek help when there is something they do not understand.
Attendance: Daily attendance rate for teachers: _____	_____ % of families and _____ % of teachers and school staff report that families monitor their children’s attendance.	Daily attendance rate for students: _____ _____ % of students were absent ten or more days in the past year.
Providing and supporting sound instruction		
Instruction: _____ % of families and _____ % of students indicate that the instructional program is challenging, and that it is tailored to students who progress at different rates. _____ % of teachers have credentials to teach in their subject.		
Homework: _____ % of families and _____ % of students report that meaningful homework is assigned and returned promptly with comments.	_____ % of families and _____ % of teachers report that families supervise completion of homework and sign off on completed assignments.	_____ % of teachers report that students come to school with homework complete.

Step 4

Shared responsibility for student learning and high achievement (cont'd)

Schools	Families	Students
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Providing and supporting sound instruction (cont'd)

<p>Reading:</p> <p>_____ % of families report that the school provides them with challenging materials that support reading outside school (for example, reading lists and suggested activities).</p>	<p>_____ % of families report that family members read with their child or encourage their child to read daily.</p>	<p>_____ % of students report that they read at least 20 minutes a day.</p>
<p>Math:</p> <p>_____ % of families report that the school makes clear the sequence of courses necessary for all students in order to take the advanced math courses in high school.</p>	<p>_____ % of families indicate that they understand the importance of their children taking algebra and geometry.</p>	<p>By middle school, _____ % of students indicate that they recognize the importance of taking algebra and geometry.</p>

Making schools safe and drug free

<p>_____ % of families and _____ % of students believe that the school discipline policy is clear and uniformly enforced.</p> <p>Number of disciplinary incidents per year: _____</p> <p>Suspension rate: _____</p> <p>_____ % of students indicate they feel safe at school.</p>	<p>_____ % of families and _____ % of students report that families talk with their children about the dangers of drugs, alcohol, and weapons.</p>	<p>_____ % of students report using drugs or alcohol in the last month.</p> <p>Number of fights on campus in the last year: _____</p>
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Applying modern technology

<p>_____ % of teachers report that they have an adequate number of computers and appropriate software to use in instruction.</p> <p>_____ % of teachers indicate that they use computers and the Internet in classroom instruction.</p>	<p>_____ % of students report that their families and the school help them find ways to learn about technology outside school (whether at home, at a public library, or through a community program).</p>	<p>_____ % of students report regularly using computers for learning.</p>
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Shared responsibility for communication

Schools	Families	Students
Communication on student progress		
<p>_____ % of families report that the school holds parent-teacher conferences at convenient times and locations.</p> <p>School translates information and materials for families into other languages.</p> <p>_____ Yes _____ No</p>	<p>_____ % of families attend parent-teacher conferences.</p>	<p>_____ % of students report talking with their families about what they are doing at school.</p>
School climate		
<p>_____ % of families and _____ % of students indicate that they feel welcome at the school and that the school respects their opinions.</p>	<p>_____ % of school staff and teachers indicate that families are responsive to their concerns.</p>	<p>_____ % of teachers report that students are respectful of one another and of teachers.</p>

Shared responsibility for building capacity

Training		
<p>_____ % of teachers and school staff have participated in training in family involvement.</p>	<p>_____ % of families participate in workshops on achieving higher standards to learn how they can help their children.</p>	
Volunteering		
<p>_____ % of families report that the school provides high-quality, well-organized opportunities to volunteer at the school.</p>	<p>_____ % of families volunteer at the school.</p> <p>_____ % of volunteers report that they actively recruit new families to help out at the school.</p>	<p>_____ % of students volunteer at the school or in the community</p>

Notes



Strengthen Your Compact

5

Parents, teachers, school staff, educators, students, community members—we all need to work together every day to reach the goals we have for our children. The compact is about striving to improve student achievement. A continuous assessment of how well all partners are doing in this effort will allow you to improve and strengthen your compact. At least once a year, your school team needs to review and revise your compact. But don't wait for formal revisions. Your school team can meet several times a year in order to use the information available to identify opportunities for improvement and to focus your efforts.

Build on your success

Within each compact area, some aspects will be working better than others. For those parts of your compact that seem to be working, what are the reasons? What can you learn from your effective practices that may help improve other areas?

Think about how you can use your success to gain greater support for your school, for family involvement in your school, and for the compact itself. Publicize your achievements as a fulfillment of the compact.

As you reward yourself for good work, you will create greater interest in and enthusiasm for the compact.

Identify areas in need of improvement

Are the different partners to your compact *doing things right*?

That is, is your compact being followed? Are resources being allocated as intended? Are appropriate training and time being made available for family and community involvement to work?

Are you *doing the right things*?

Does your compact include appropriate responsibilities and strategies? Does it address the needs of your school and your school community? Have your needs changed at all?

Develop solutions

- Brainstorm as a team.
- Talk to other schools to see what's working for them.
- Conduct a focus group with members of your school community.

To find out more about what's going on in the school, use the Education Excellence Partnership's questions related to standards found in *Activity Sheet A: Taking Stock of Standards* as a framework for discussion.

To find out more about what's happening with your compact, use the questions in *Activity Sheet C: Check Your Pulse*.

- Consider using research-based approaches.

Look at whole school models, such as New American Schools, a nonprofit corporation that has tested seven models in communities and states across the nation. Consider other programs, such as the programs of the National Center for Family Literacy, MegaSkills by the Home and School Institute, Accelerated Schools, Family Math, and Reading Recovery.

Learn about the latest research. The U.S. Department of Education has new research on student performance in math and science available in the TIMMS Tool Kit.

Contact professional organizations for guidance in particular areas of concern.

- Search the Web for more information and resources.

The Partnership for Family Involvement in Education Web page at www.ed.gov/PFIE is a great place to begin. Look in Appendix C for other resources on the Internet and elsewhere.

Brainstorming session

In this section, you will find some ideas on how to overcome barriers that may arise as you implement your compact. In each example, schools, families, and communities joined together to develop an effective solution to a specific problem at the school. The solutions touch on all three areas of shared responsibility: student learning, communication, and building capacity through training and volunteering. What makes these solutions so effective is the initiative taken by the partners at the schools. Take a look at how a strong family-school-community partnership can help turn obstacles into opportunities.

Shared responsibility for student learning and high achievement

Problem: Students lose three to four months of reading skills over the summer.

Solution: Kansas City, Missouri, uses READ*WRITE*NOW!, the summer reading component of the *America Reads Challenge*, in its three Rs project, Reinforcing Reading and Writing, which pairs Title I staff, local Girl Scouts of the U.S.A., and middle school volunteers with students as reading partners while providing the students with daily reading activities and experiences, such as visiting the library.

Problem: School experiences disruptive and sometimes delinquent student behavior at school-sponsored events.

Solution: At Beech Grove City Schools in Indiana, a group of fathers formed the “security dads” to ensure proper behavior through their presence at school-sponsored events. As a result of this effort, paternal involvement in school and in children’s activities has increased, and student behavior at events has improved.

Problem: Families are not sure what specific help their children may need to achieve to high academic standards.

Solution: Parents at the Wendall Phillips Magnet School in Kansas City asked for and received weekly student progress reports to help them keep track of those areas in which their children needed to improve. One parent commented, “If I know what my child is studying, I can help him at home and can see what progress he is making.”

Shared responsibility for communication

Problem: Families of Hispanic students are not involved at the school because of a language barrier.

Solution: Hueco Elementary School in El Paso, Texas, conducts all family-school communications, parent workshops, and meetings in both Spanish and English. To ensure that all parents can participate actively in these events, the district purchased translation equipment with Title I funds.

Problem: Teachers, school staff, and families are “too busy” to communicate.

Solution: The Carter Lawrence Middle School in Nashville, Tennessee, added a telephone number for parents that provides a recorded message informing them of classroom and school activities. Parents can receive targeted voice messages about their own children’s progress and can leave messages detailing their reactions and concerns.

Problem: Parent-teacher conferences and other school meetings have low attendance.

Solution: Buhner Elementary School in Cleveland, Ohio, rejects the assumption that parents who don’t show up at school are not interested. Instead, the school makes it easy for families to get involved in their children’s education. Teachers hold parent conferences off campus in places closer to students’ homes. The school also holds “block parent meetings” for those families who cannot attend school events because they live on the outskirts of the community and lack transportation. Block meetings, which take place every few months in a parent’s home or a nearby library, address parents’ concerns and offer an opportunity to discuss school-related information.

Shared responsibility for

building capacity through training and volunteering

Problem: Students must pass the state assessment test to graduate from high school.

Solution: Roosevelt High School in Dallas, Texas, enlists the help of parents to ensure that all students pass the test. They invited parents to an evening class to review the state assessment instrument and to discuss the skills their children are expected to demonstrate on the test. The school plans to hold workshops on a variety of topics that concern parents and students, such as getting ready for college.

Problem: Teachers and school staff aren’t sure how to work with families.

Solution: In Stockton, California, “mentor parents”—trained at the district’s parent resource center—spent 5,000 hours in the schools helping school staff improve family-school communication and parents’ involvement in their children’s learning. Among other activities, mentor parents conducted four workshops on obstacles to family involvement in schools, including parents’ own negative experiences with school and teacher bias, which may result from cultural or language differences between teacher and parent.

Problem: _____

Solution: _____

Conclusion

As you use *Activity Sheet F: Take Action* to create your action plan, remember that your compact is an action plan. It focuses the action of your partners on a goal of improved student learning and effective school performance, and it clarifies the specific responsibilities of each of your partners to help meet this goal. The compact process is not just five steps; it is a cycle of continuous improvement. Each step requires thinking, collaborating, action, and reflection. Continuous improvement means

that you are constantly reviewing where you've been and looking ahead to determine where to go next.

Making your compact work will be a challenge, but it will be a rewarding challenge as you begin to see more and more students learning to high academic standards. Use the challenge to strengthen your family-school-community partnership for learning. The compact will help your school become a true learning community with standards of excellence for all partners.



5 Strengthen Your Compact

Activity Sheet F: Take Action

Directions: Based on Activity Sheets D and E, make a list of your strengths and weaknesses. Use the following worksheet to design an improvement plan.

Area identified for improvement: _____

Why improvement is needed (based on progress towards standards and local, state, and national comparisons):

Improvement strategies. How will you strengthen your actions in this area? What specific actions will you take with reference to learning, to communication, and to volunteering and training? How will each partner contribute to the effort?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Do you need to make any specific changes to the compact document itself?



Notes

