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Engaging Parents in Education: Lessons From Five Parental Information And Resource Centers

INNOVATIONS IN EDUCATION

Engaging Parents in Education: Lessons From Five Parental Information And Resource Centers

I N N O V A T I O N S I N E D U C A T I O N

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Foreword

I am pleased to introduce the second publication in the latest *Innovations in Education* series—*Engaging Parents in Education: Lessons from Five Parental Information and Resource Centers*. This series identifies innovative and successful education programs across the country that are closing the achievement gap and helping us reach our goal of every child reading and doing math at grade level by 2014.

The five Parental Information and Resource Centers (PIRCs) profiled in this book demonstrate how PIRCs and their partnering organizations can successfully increase parental involvement in education. They emphasize the power of strong parent-educator partnerships in improving schools and raising students' academic achievement.

A parent is a child's first and most important teacher, which is why the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)* recognizes parents' vital role in education. *NCLB* has sent a strong message that results matter and that parents deserve more information and options, especially when their public schools do not live up to their promise. Under this law, parents must be informed if their school or district is identified for improvement because it has not made Adequate Yearly Progress. Parents also have more options than ever before for their children's education, with magnet schools, charter schools, intensive tutoring, and public school choice.

PIRCs serve the important purpose of supplying parents with information about the range of programs and services available to them. Many parents, especially those who are economically disadvantaged or limited English proficient, need assistance to learn whom to talk to when they have questions about their child's education or simply want to become more involved in their local schools and community. PIRCs have been designed with these parents and their needs in mind.

As an education advocate and a mother, I hope you will find this guide informative and helpful. As we work to improve education for all of America's children, it's important that we continue to make sure parents are empowered with the information and resources they need to make the best decisions for their children.

Margaret Spellings, Secretary
U.S. Department of Education



Abbreviations

ADI (Academic Development Institute)—an Illinois nonprofit organization that received funding to operate a PIRC from 1997 to 2006

ARISE (full term; not an abbreviation)—a faith-based nonprofit organization providing a variety of services to immigrant families of south Texas

AYP (adequate yearly progress)—state-designated academic progress goals for schools and districts, aimed at encouraging improved performance among all student subgroups

CIPL (Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership)—a Kentucky-based program whose parent training model has been used by three of the PIRCs highlighted in this guide

CPL (Center for Parent Leadership)—a program run by CIPL that provides consulting services for other organizations wanting to provide their own parent leadership training

IDEA (*Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*)—a federal law mandating that all children with disabilities have access to a free, appropriate public education; it emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet the unique needs of these students and prepare them for employment and independent living

IDRA (Intercultural Development Research Association)—a Texas-based nonprofit organization that received funding to operate a PIRC starting in 1999 and was refunded in 2006

IEP (individualized education program)—a written plan for educational support services and their expected outcomes developed for students designated for special education

IPS (Indianapolis Public Schools)—public school district for Indianapolis, Ind.

ISRC (Illinois Service Resource Center)—an Illinois State Board of Education technical assistance program funded with a grant under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*

LEA (local education agency)—an education agency (e.g., district) at the local level that exists primarily to operate schools or to contract for education services. A single school may sometimes be considered an LEA.

NCLB (*No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*)—signed into law in January 2002 and intended to help close the achievement gap between disadvantaged and minority students and their peers by improving public schools, this federal legislation is based on four basic principles: stronger accountability for results, increased flexibility and local control, expanded options for parents, and an emphasis on proven teaching methods. Key features include the alignment of high state academic standards and statewide assessments, the use of qualified teachers, greater parent involvement, and, when schools do not perform up to par, the options of school choice, supplemental tutoring, or both, for eligible students.

NNPS (National Network of Partnership Schools)—a program of Johns Hopkins University that invites schools, districts, states, and organizations to join together and use research-based approaches to organize and sustain programs of family and community involvement aimed at increasing student success in school

PIRC (Parental Information and Resource Center)—the federal grant program authorized by *NCLB* to help implement effective parent involvement policies, programs, and activities intended to improve student academic achievement and to strengthen partnerships among parents, teachers, principals, administrators, and others to meet children's education needs

RQP (Right Question Project)—a Cambridge, Mass.-based nonprofit program that develops and disseminates innovative methods (e.g., training) to prepare people, irrespective of their literacy or education levels, to advocate for themselves and participate more effectively in decision-making processes that affect them

SEA (state education agency)—the state board of education or other agency or officer primarily responsible for the supervision of public elementary and secondary schools in a state

SES (supplemental educational services)—a provision of *NCLB* that provides free tutoring services or additional academic help outside the regular school day for students from low-income families when their school enters year two of school improvement and is designated “in need of improvement”

WOW (WOW! Workshops on Workshops)—training offered by IDRA for individuals who would like to be able to facilitate parent leadership training



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Introduction

Children benefit academically when parents and educators work together. For this reason, parents' involvement in their children's education is a priority of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. But a strong connection between parents and educators does not come about automatically. Both parties may need to learn new roles and skills and develop the confidence to use them, especially as parents move beyond traditional activities, like helping children with homework, and toward shared responsibility for school improvement. Intermediary organizations, like federally funded Parental Information and Resource Centers (PIRCs), can help. Drawing on lessons learned from five PIRCs across the country that have been meeting this challenge, this guide shares promising strategies for increasing effective parent involvement.*

Rosa Sanchez is a Maryland mother whose experience illustrates what can happen when parents receive help in developing the knowledge, skills, and confidence to participate to greater degrees and in new ways in their children's education. It was not as if Sanchez had been uninvolved to start with. As the mother of four children in Maryland public schools, she had volunteered in their classrooms and helped out with some events sponsored by the parent-teacher organization at her school. Yet when Sanchez had questions about her children's education, she did not always know where to go for help or, if she did, she did not always have the confidence to ask.

Although Sanchez did not regularly attend parent-teacher organization meetings, the president of that group had seen enough to know that this dedicated mother had more to offer; she nominated Sanchez to participate in the Maryland Parent Leadership Institute. This six-day, three-weekend training program produced by the Family Works—the PIRC that was serving the state of Maryland—was designed to help parents understand the state's standards-based

assessment system, the resources of *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)*, and techniques and strategies for increasing parents' involvement in their children's schools. Sanchez, who speaks English as a second language, initially worried that she would be unable to keep up with the institute's presentations and discussion. But with others urging her on, she agreed to participate, becoming one of 20 members selected for the institute's leadership class of 2004.

Over the course of the sessions, Sanchez's confidence grew along with her understanding of effective family involvement techniques and ways parents can contribute to their children's school success. When it came time for participants to plan and implement a project at their children's school, Sanchez set out to jump-start Hispanic parent involvement. To that end, she organized Spanish-language "study circles"—parent meetings in which participants learned

* When using the term *parent*, this guide intends it to refer as well to a child's guardian or any other adult who plays a significant role in a minor's life.

about and discussed basic school functions and activities, and how to be involved; for example, they discussed how to read the school report card, which, as required under *NCLB*, describes how the school itself is performing in a variety of areas, including its students' performance on state assessments. In addition, she worked with the principal to be sure that both homework directions and teacher comments on students' report cards were translated for parents with limited English. Perhaps most importantly, Sanchez made sure parents with limited English understood to whom they could turn and how to ask for help if they had questions or problems related to their children's schooling. Additional Hispanic parents have started getting involved thanks to Sanchez's efforts, and Sanchez herself has become increasingly active. Even as she continues to volunteer in the classroom, she also has assumed leadership positions in the parent-teacher organization not just at one school, but at two: At the school her youngest children still attend, Sanchez serves as vice president of parent outreach; at the high school her oldest now attends, she serves as the group's liaison to other Hispanic families. And when Sanchez has questions about her own or other children's education, you better believe she knows who and how to ask.

Education research over the past three decades has established a direct correlation between increased parent involvement and increased student achievement. One of the most comprehensive parent involvement studies done to date (encompassing more than 51 research studies and literature reviews) is *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement*.¹ After reviewing a wide range of studies

on parent involvement, Henderson and Mapp found that "students with involved parents, no matter what their income or background, were 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." Additionally, the study found, "Schools that succeed in engaging families from very diverse backgrounds share three key practices:

- Focusing on building trusting collaborative relationships among teachers, families, and community members;
- Recognizing, respecting, and addressing families' needs and any class and cultural differences; and
- Embracing a philosophy of partnership where power and responsibility are shared."²

By the U.S. Department of Education's definition, parent involvement occurs when parents and educators participate in "regular two-way and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities."³ In this definition, parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their children's learning at school and are included, as appropriate, in decision-making activities, for example, sitting on parent advisory councils, which inform the policies affecting their children's education. (See "Engaging Parents as Education Advisors" on p. 3.)

NCLB and Parent Involvement

NCLB recognizes the value of parent participation in the formal education endeavor, as

Engaging Parents as Education Advisors

Although *PTA* is a common household term, recognized by most parents in the United States as the parent-teacher association, less is known about parent advisory councils (PACs). PACs are parent-led organizations that function at the state, district, or school level to give parents more clout regarding their children's education. PACs promote parent influence in multiple ways, including polling communities to better understand parents' needs and wants, recommending policy, and advocating for the rights of parents to be involved in the education of their children.

One prime example of a well-functioning PAC is M-PAC, the Maryland Parent Advisory Council. In 2001, the state of Maryland adopted one of the most inclusive parent involvement policies in the country, but state education superintendent Nancy S. Grasmick thought more could be done. In the fall of 2003, she convened M-PAC, a statewide group of 125 appointed members charged with researching the state of parent involvement in Maryland's K–12 education and recommending how to strengthen it.

To help ensure broad parent representation on M-PAC, the state education department sent membership nomination forms to churches, public libraries, community centers, schools, and other institutions where parents gather. The intent was to reach the full range of parent types, including those who are often underrepresented (e.g., grandparents, foster parents, parents of children in special education, military parents). As a result of this effort, the vast majority of M-PAC members ended up being parents.

Once M-PAC was up and running, it used a statewide survey to solicit from parents, educators, administrators, and community members across the state their thoughts on the current state of parent involvement in Maryland and what they would like to see for the future. Survey results identified three areas for further study by council subcommittees: parent involvement, using nontraditional (i.e., alternative) forms of communication to engage a broader range of parents, and education policy. At the end of two years, council recommendations were vetted through a series of public forums held in all 24 local school systems. The Maryland State Board of Education then approved the final report, *A Shared Responsibility: Recommendations for Increasing Family and Community Involvement in Schools*, (August 2005).⁴ Implementation of recommendations began in September 2006.

evidenced in its parent-involvement requirements for schools, districts, and state education agencies (SEAs) (see fig. 1, Selected Parent Involvement Requirements Under Title I of *NCLB* by Type of Education Agency, on p. 4). For example, under *NCLB*, all Title I schools, which receive special federal funding to raise the performance of disadvantaged students, must develop parent involvement policies and strategies, and all but the smallest (i.e., a district that receives under \$500,000 in Title I funding) must spend at least 1 percent of their Title I funding on parent training and education

programs.⁵ The legislation also has resulted in additional parent involvement requirements for any school or district identified under its state education accountability system as being “in need of improvement” because for two years in a row it has not reached state-designated progress goals, known as Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). For example, individual parents must be informed in a timely and direct fashion if their school or district falls into “improvement” status and if, as a result, their child becomes eligible for school choice⁶ or supplemental educational services (SES).⁷ These schools and districts also

Figure 1. Selected Parent Involvement Requirements Under Title I of *NCLB*
By Type of Education Agency

Type of Agency	Related Parent Involvement Requirements (for schools, local districts, and state education agencies)
Title I Schools ^a	<i>School</i> works with parents to develop a parent involvement policy. ^b
	<i>School</i> works with parents to develop a school-parent compact. ^c
	<i>School</i> distributes both the parent involvement policy and school-parent compact to the parents.
	Through partnership between parents and staff, <i>school</i> builds families' capacity to improve student achievement.
Schools in Need of Improvement ^d	<i>School</i> consults with parents in developing a school improvement plan, ^e to be completed no more than three months after school has been identified as in need of improvement.
	<i>District</i> promptly provides the following communications to the parents of each enrolled student: an explanation of what it means to be a school in need of improvement; the reason(s) the school has been identified for improvement; an explanation of how parents can become involved in resolving the academic issues that led to identification; and, in year one of improvement status, an explanation of student choice options. ^f
	If a school enters a second year of improvement status, <i>district</i> provides and communicates the availability of supplemental educational services for eligible children.
	If a school is identified for restructuring (i.e., reorganization) because it has failed to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) for five years, <i>district</i> provides parents with prompt notice of the decision, provides the opportunity for parents to comment before taking restructuring action, and invites parents to participate in the development of the school's restructuring plan.
School Districts	<i>District</i> develops jointly with parents a written parent involvement policy that they have agreed on as part of the district Title I plan.
	<i>District</i> distributes the parent involvement policy to parents.
	<i>District</i> distributes to parents a report card on the performance of every school and of the district as a whole. As noted above, if schools are not making AYP, <i>district</i> also distributes information on school choice options and supplemental educational services.
	<i>District</i> along with parents conducts a yearly evaluation of its parental involvement policy.
	<i>District</i> promotes family and school partnership and builds capacity for parents and staff to work together to raise student achievement.
Local Districts in Need of Improvement	When a <i>district</i> is identified for improvement, the district must provide notification to parents of each student enrolled in the schools served by that district. This communication includes the reasons for the identification, what corrective actions will be taken to improve the district, and how parents can participate in these improvement efforts.
	<i>District</i> consults with parents in developing a district improvement plan.
	<i>State education agency</i> provides district with technical assistance to address any problems that districts in need of improvement may have with implementing parent involvement measures.

Figure 1. (cont'd.)

Type of Agency	Related Parent Involvement Requirements (for schools, local districts, and state education agencies)
State Education Agencies	<i>State education agency reviews each Title I application to ensure that it complies with the law with respect to parent involvement.</i>
	<i>State education agency provides technical assistance to local schools and districts in their parental involvement activities.</i>
	<i>State education agency supports the collection and dissemination to its districts and schools of effective parental involvement practices that are based on the most current high-quality research, that foster achievement and high standards for all children, and are geared toward lowering barriers to greater participation by parents in school planning, review, and improvement processes.</i>
	<i>State education agency monitors the implementation of parent involvement requirements.</i>

^a Title I schools are those that have high numbers or a high percentage of students living in poverty and that, therefore, are awarded special funding from the U.S. Department of Education.

^b A parent involvement policy spells out how parents will be involved in meaningful ways in making school decisions and otherwise participating in setting the school's direction.

^c A school-parent compact, which should be distributed to all parents and staff, describes how educators and parents will build a partnership to improve student achievement.

^d Schools in need of improvement are those that receive Title I funds and that have not met state reading and math goals for at least two years.

^e A school improvement plan is a two-year plan that addresses the academic issues that have caused the school to be identified for improvement.

^f Student choice options: Parents must be told of the option to transfer their child to another school in the district that has not been identified for improvement.

are required to engage parents in the development of the school or district improvement plan, and the plan itself must include strategies to promote effective parent involvement. In all of this, parents are being asked to participate in decisions that will influence the education of their children and other students throughout schools, districts, and sometimes even the state.

Although *NCLB* recognizes that parents are an important resource, mining that resource can be difficult. Parents who are committed and confident enough to get involved, make the necessary time to do so, recognize intuitively where and how they are needed, are prepared to meet

the need, and are ready to step up as leaders—these parents are like gold: highly valuable but far from common. As states, districts, and schools search for ways to engage greater numbers of parents in more meaningful ways, many find it challenging to increase the rates and types of parent involvement. This appears to be especially true at schools serving low-income and limited English proficient populations⁸ for whom a variety of factors are likely to inhibit parent involvement, including families' difficult circumstances (e.g., parents working multiple jobs, homelessness, uncertain immigration status), parents' negative education experiences when they were students, language barriers,

and, for some immigrant parents, cultural mores supporting the idea that they should not question teachers.

Does this mean that parents who are not involved with their children's school or district do not care about the children's education? No. What it more likely means is that many parents do not know how to get involved, do not feel capable of contributing in a meaningful way, or simply do not feel welcome. What these parents need is more information, support, encouragement, or, even, specific training—something that schools and districts are not always well positioned to provide. That is the premise underlying the nation's system of Parental Information and Resource Centers.

Parental Information and Resource Centers

Parental Information and Resource Centers (PIRCs) were conceived by Congress under the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* to provide parents, schools, and other organizations working with families with the information and support (including training and technical assistance) needed to understand how children develop and what they need to succeed in school. The first 28 PIRCs were funded by the U.S. Department of Education in 1995. Since then, the PIRCs' role has expanded to include helping education agencies implement *NCLB*'s parent-involvement mandates. (See “Key Roles for a Parental Information and Resource Center [PIRC],” on p. 7.)

Some PIRCs are stand-alone entities; others operate as a program within a larger umbrella

organization. All are funded through a competitive grant process whose guidelines have changed throughout the years based on new laws and Department priorities. The 2006 PIRC awards, which were granted as this guide was being written, reflect such changes. Although the “new” PIRCs have the same statutory mission as previously funded PIRCs, their service areas are configured differently. In previous years, some states had no PIRC while others were served by more than one. In contrast, the most recent award cycle usually only funded one PIRC for each state, with the requirement that the grantee serve parents and educators across the whole state. The recently funded PIRCs also have some timely new priorities: They are specifically required to increase parents' understanding of *NCLB* and its potential ramifications for their family. The new PIRCs also are expected to help SEAs and local education agencies (LEAs) more fully implement their own parent involvement responsibilities under Title I—responsibilities geared ultimately to improving student academic achievement and overall school performance, including, for example, lowering dropout rates and raising graduation rates.

PIRCs are by no means the only programs with a focus on generating greater and more effective parent involvement. In fact, as is evident throughout this guide, PIRCs often partner with other organizations to increase their reach and influence. But their singular focus has led some experienced PIRCs to develop and hone promising outreach and engagement strategies worth sharing with other organizations that have the same or similar parent involvement goals, including newly funded PIRCs, other parent involvement organizations, LEAs, SEAs, and

individual schools. This guide highlights the parent- and educator-engagement practices of five PIRCs that received funds in earlier grant competitions. That is, although several were first funded in the late 1990s, the guide focuses on the work of these PIRCs during the funding periods starting in fiscal year 2002 and 2003 and continuing to the end of 2006. Though the new PIRC priorities represented in the 2006 awards have resulted in only three of these five PIRCs being refunded, all five are considered to have implemented effective strategies based on the mandates of the funding grants that were in place at the time of this study. The strategies in this guide are drawn from the following five PIRCs (for selected characteristics of each, see table 1, on p. 8):

- The Academic Development Institute's PIRC, Lincoln, Ill.;
- The Family Works, Gaithersburg, Md.;
- Indiana Center for Family, School, and Community Partnerships, Indianapolis;
- The Intercultural Development Research Association's PIRC, San Antonio, Tex.; and
- The Utah Family Center, Salt Lake City.

How these PIRCs and their partnering organizations have been pursuing the goal of increased parent involvement and parent-educator partnerships—especially in the context of *NCLB* with its push to improve schools and close the achievement gap—is the subject of this guide.

Key Roles for a Parental Information and Resource Center (PIRC)

As defined by the Department of Education, the funding agency for PIRCs, key PIRC roles include:

- Providing leadership, technical assistance, and support in the implementation of successful and effective parent involvement policies, programs, and activities intended to improve student academic achievement;
- Strengthening partnerships among parents (including parents of children from birth through age 5), teachers, principals, administrators, and other school personnel in meeting the education needs of children;
- Developing and strengthening the relationship between parents and their children's school; and
- Providing a comprehensive approach to improving student learning, through coordination and integration of federal, state, and local services and programs.

Table 1. Selected Characteristics of Highlighted Parental Information and Resource Centers

Parental Information and Resource Center (PIRC) and state	Organizational status (stand-alone or part of larger agency)	Staffing allocations ^a Full-time (FTE) Part-time (PTE)	Years of PIRC funding	Parent involvement strategies highlighted in guide
Academic Development Institute's PIRC, Ill.	Has functioned as a program of the Academic Development Institute.	5 FTEs, 5 PTEs, 4 consultants Also utilizes staff from larger parent organization.	1997–2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partner with community- and faith-based organizations to disseminate information Build a school community of parents and educators Help schools assess family friendliness Develop programs to assist parents of children with special needs
The Family Works, Md.	Has functioned as a program of the Family Services Agency, Inc., but has separate program name.	5 FTEs	1995–2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enlist and train community-based organizations to disseminate <i>NCLB</i> information Train parent leaders Provide partnership training and support for educators Support state-level parent advisory board efforts
Indiana Center for Family, School and Community Partnerships, Ind.	Stand-alone program.	4 FTEs, 3 PTEs	1998–present	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish parent centers Help schools assess family friendliness Provide training and support for parent liaisons Train parent leaders Establish and support father volunteer groups
Intercultural Development Research Association's PIRC, Tex.	Functions as a program of Intercultural Development Research Association.	3 FTEs Also utilizes staff from larger parent organization.	1999–present	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate videoconferences Organize multi-sector convenings Facilitate dialogues between parents, teachers, and students Assist students in providing technical training to community Train parent leaders
Utah Family Center, Utah	Stand-alone program, with Utah State Parent-Teacher Association as its first fiscal agent.	14 FTEs, 11 part-time parent liaisons	1998–present	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish satellite parent centers Partner with the PTA to provide access to parents Train and support parent liaisons Provide partnership training for educators

^a PIRC data were collected in the three-year grant cycle ending on Dec. 31, 2006, so staffing numbers are reflective of this cycle.

Methodology

The five PIRCs highlighted in this guide were selected through a process that draws on both benchmarking and case study methodologies and is described more fully in Appendix A. An external advisory group comprising researchers and practitioners helped guide the development of the conceptual framework and criteria used to screen programs for inclusion in the guide. From an initial list of 45 centers or other programs that promote and support parent involvement, 27 were chosen for additional screening that included both interviews to confirm preliminary information about initiatives and a review of evidence of impact (e.g., growing numbers of clients served, client satisfaction). From these 27 programs, the five highlighted PIRCs were chosen, based on the range and quality of their practices, coupled with the organizations' locations and the demographics of their target populations, and the quality of their collaborations with other parent involvement organizations or education agencies.

Once the five sites were selected, two-day site visits were conducted to find out more about their practices and their partnerships. The site visits, facilitated by each PIRC director, included interviews and focus groups with students, parents, PIRC staff, school, district, and state staff, as well as with staff from any associated organizations. The methodology also included observing key events, such as trainings, summits, and conferences. In addition, the PIRC director at each site provided artifacts that support the strategies, such as meeting agendas, training materials, and surveys, some of which are featured in the illustrative figures throughout this guide. Over 400 artifacts were collected from across the five sites and these artifacts, along with the

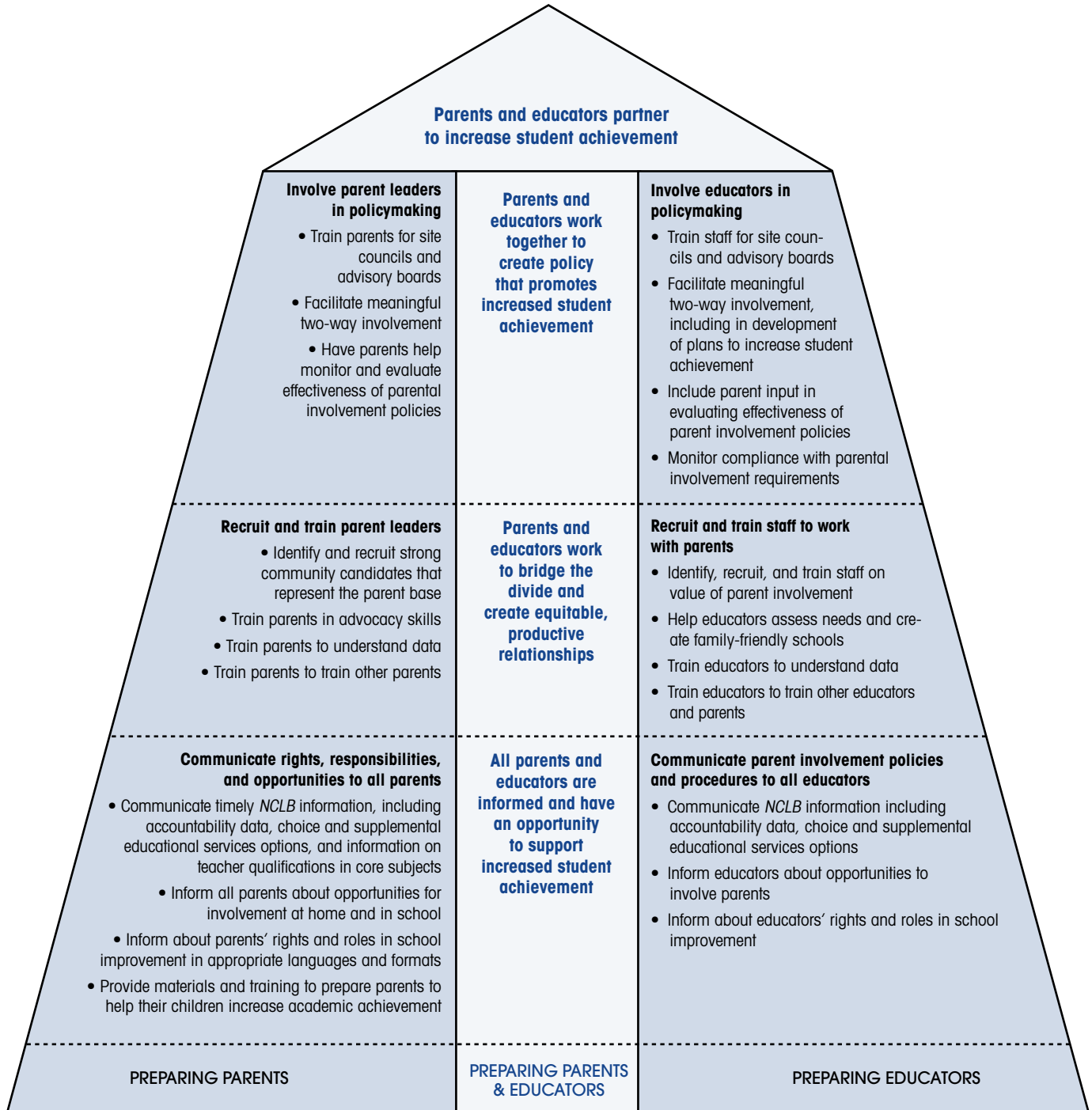
site observations and interview and focus group data, were used to develop a case study for each site. This guide is based on the case studies.

Conceptual Framework for Study

Parent involvement in education can mean many things, from parents instilling a strong work ethic in their children to a parent's membership on a state board of education. It can mean parents participating with their toddler in a developmentally appropriate playgroup or taking their high school student on a tour of colleges. This guide, however, focuses on PIRCs' work in the K–12 arena, especially—although not exclusively—as it relates to *NCLB's* parent-involvement requirements (see fig. 1).

Involvement in children's education starts at home, of course, with primary caregivers providing love, a healthy environment, developmentally appropriate learning experiences, and, as children start school, encouragement, a positive attitude about learning, and homework support. But within the formal education system, parent involvement is most effective when viewed as a partnership between parents and educators. The conceptual model developed by WestEd for this study is based on current parent involvement research along with input from parent involvement practitioners (e.g., PIRC and other parent organization directors) on the advisory committee. This model focuses on how both parents and educators can come together to work more effectively in support of children's successful education. (See fig. 2, *Partnering Between Parents and Educators to Increase Student Achievement: A Conceptual Model for Parent Involvement in Education*, on p. 10.) As evident in the figure, the end goal in this model is having successful parent and educator partnerships to increase student achievement.

Figure 2. Partnering Between Parents and Educators to Increase Student Achievement: A Conceptual Model for Parent Involvement in Education



In this model, the first stage in moving toward the end goal of parent-educator partnerships to support student learning entails making sure parents and educators receive and have the same understanding of important education-related information. This information includes but is not limited to relevant school and district data, parents' rights and responsibilities in their children's formal education, options available to families under *NCLB* or state or district programs, and how parents can contribute to improved education outcomes for their own children and other students.

Being fully informed about their children's education enables parents to better decide the degree to which they want to become involved and the type of action they may want to take. Do they want to limit their role to supporting their child's learning at home? Serve as a classroom volunteer? Become active in school governance? Participate in policy decisions? For some parents, having adequate information may suffice as preparation for greater involvement. Others, however, may benefit from training, such as reflected in the conceptual model's second stage (e.g., to help parents become leaders, train them to understand data) and third stage (e.g., to help parents get involved in policymaking, train them to serve on school site councils and advisory boards).

For educators, some types of partnerships with parents may be required, as, for example, when there is a state mandate to have school site councils that include both teacher and parent representatives. Other parent-educator partnerships, such as efforts to create a more family-friendly school, may be taken on by choice, because they seem to be a good option at a given school. Either way, educators, too, may benefit from training if they are to engage effectively

with parents in pursuit of higher student achievement. As will be evident in this guide, while the five highlighted PIRCs have common goals, objectives, and strategies, all reflecting some aspects of this conceptual model, there are some differences in how they implement various elements. Moreover, given that the model poses an ideal, it is not surprising that some of its elements have been more fully implemented than others. For example, due to the focus of the earlier PIRC grants on training and informing *parents*, the PIRCs featured here have targeted more of their efforts on the left-hand side of the model and done less with educators. A new Department of Education-established priority for PIRCs in the 2006 funding round to work with state and district Title I offices is intended to shift the focus to parent and educator *partnerships* and to push more fully into the right-hand side of the model, with educators receiving training and support to become better and more active partners with parents. Once both parents and educators are equipped with the information (first stage) and training (second stage) needed for successful partnership, a push into the third stage, that is, joint policymaking, is a natural next step.

Parts I and II of this guide, starting on pages 13 and 37, respectively, identify and describe some of the key strategies used by these highlighted PIRCs in supporting effective parent involvement. Part I focuses on PIRC efforts to build a common foundation of information and understanding for parents and educators. Part II focuses on readying parents and educators for action and decision-making intended to improve education. Both sections—Parts I and II—include a series of “Tips” boxes that have distilled the strategies from each subsection into easily scannable lists of implementation suggestions.



PART I

The PIRCs' Role in Building Understanding Of *NCLB* and Other Education-related Issues

*The amount and variety of information—from the general to the specific—that can help parents more effectively support their children's education seems almost infinite: how children learn; how to support that learning at home, including how best to help with homework; how to know whether their children are performing as well as possible; how well the school and district are carrying out their responsibilities; how to decipher a school report card; what volunteer opportunities exist at their children's school; ways, if any, of influencing school or district policies and practices; how *NCLB* affects them as parents; what a school-parent compact is; what AYP is; what options exist if the school is not adequately serving their children; what services and rights exist for children with special needs; and how to know if their children qualify for SES. And that is just for starters.*

Ensuring that parents receive and understand the information they need to support their children's education is a major responsibility of the PIRCs. Today, that means, first and foremost, making sure parents understand their rights, responsibilities, and opportunities under *NCLB*, such as participating in development of a school-parent compact (i.e., a written agreement among parents, school staff, and the community about how to help students reach high academic standards) or exercising their children's options for school choice or SES. Many educators also need to better understand how *NCLB* affects parents' rights and opportunities in relation to their children's education, as well as how parents' growing knowledge of *NCLB*

and other education-related issues might cause them to want to become a more active partner with their children's school.

Understanding the Audience

A variety of factors, such as the growing rate of non-English-speaking families in the schools, changing family composition, poverty, and family mobility, require that PIRCs be creative and persistent, especially in their efforts to connect with educationally and economically disadvantaged parents. Per the requirements of PIRC grants, they must find ways to assess the communication needs of their constituents and

address them through a variety of strategies. Though PIRCs in general have been focused most intensely on reaching parents, they recognize the need to communicate as well with teachers and other educators, which can be an equally challenging proposition, although for different reasons. For example, some site administrators may assume that they and their staff already know as much as they need to know about *NCLB* or already have sufficient parent involvement, so they see no reason to allocate limited staff development time to these issues. To help address such barriers, PIRCs like the Indiana Center for Family, School, and Community Partnerships (referred to hereafter as the Indiana Partnerships Center), based in Indianapolis, and the Family Works, based in Gaithersburg, Md., began working directly with district- and state-level education agencies, respectively. The trust developed through such relationships can yield greater access to staff (including but not limited to teachers), both for training purposes and for distributing materials (e.g., *NCLB* guides) to educators and, through them, to parents.

Although, as suggested above, PIRCs have been making inroads in communicating with educators, this section in particular reflects the primary focus of their activities, which has been helping parents understand key issues related to their children's schooling, chief among them, *NCLB*.

Address Diverse Language Needs

For the many school districts across the country that are serving growing numbers of non-English-speaking families, successful communication with parents requires translating materials and using interpreters. But as the amount

and kind of education-related information that parents need continues to grow, some schools and districts have been unable to keep up. The highlighted PIRCs have been able to help in this area by taking advantage of economies of scale; for example, whereas one school or district might need to hire a translator to prepare materials for just 50 or 500 families, respectively, a PIRC can hire someone to translate the same or similar materials and then expect to distribute them through multiple schools and districts to 5,000 families. The Indiana Partnerships Center now offers all key parent materials and services in both English and Spanish. In recently updating its Web site, this PIRC added a Spanish language interface, which can be accessed by simply clicking an "Español" link. Through this link, the site also offers a page of resources specifically geared to families with limited proficiency in English.

The PIRC program operated by the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA), based in San Antonio, Tex., also provides most materials and services in both English and Spanish. Although IDRA's initial PIRC grant supported only three full-time staff members, the organization has used others on its staff for PIRC activities as needed. Because the majority of its staffers are fluent in both English and Spanish, staff presenters and facilitators at PIRC-produced meetings, workshops, and other gatherings for parents have been able to use what they call "simultaneous translation." In this communications approach, a speaker or presenter effectively serves as his or her own interpreter, speaking for a couple of minutes in one language and then repeating the same thing in the other language. Staff find this preferable to presenting in one language while a

second person interprets, which invariably leaves one segment of the audience feeling like they have to “catch up,” is more time-consuming, and can lead to participants losing interest. They also find it preferable to having separate sessions for parents based on their language. The point, they say, is to have all parents begin to feel comfortable working together irrespective of their languages and cultures. One focus group member who had participated in a session utilizing simultaneous translation noted that she had never before been to a parent-information gathering where the audience included both fluent English speakers and those with little or no English, where two languages were used so naturally, and where, in this case, Spanish-speakers were made to feel so at home that they were not afraid or too embarrassed to actively participate.

Making Education-related Information Available and Understandable

Under *NCLB*, parents and guardians are offered *more* information, *more* choice, and a *bigger* role in their children’s education than in the past. But if the intent of the law is as singular and straightforward as its name, its intricacies can hinder parents in using it to their children’s advantage. While education agencies generally have analysts and professional associations to help them understand the law and its ramifications, most parents do not have such resources at hand. This is where the PIRCs come in: ensuring that parents and guardians receive relevant *NCLB* information in a fashion that makes it meaningful to them, using simplified language to communicate its relevant points as clearly as possible.

Tips for Understanding the Audience

- Assess the communications needs (e.g., language, literacy level) of target audiences.
- Work through established education associations (e.g., local Title I offices, state departments of education, parent-teacher organizations) to build trust with and deliver information to teachers and other educators.
- Address parents’ diverse language needs by offering bilingual or multilingual materials, Web sites, and trainings.

A number of PIRCs have published *NCLB* guides that cover the basics of accountability, school choice, and SES, while also including more time-dependent *NCLB* information, such as legislative updates, in newsletters that are sent to parents and educators. For a more personal approach that allows parents to ask questions and discuss *NCLB*, some PIRCs, such as the Indiana Partnerships Center and the PIRC that was operated by the Academic Development Institute (ADI), based in Lincoln, Ill., have offered workshops (e.g., Indiana’s “*No Child Left Behind*, P.L. 221 & YOU!”) that specifically outline parent and educator roles in fulfilling *NCLB*’s parent involvement mandates, such as writing the school-parent compact and engaging parents in developing parent involvement policies. The Utah Family Center, based in Salt Lake City (and as of its 2006 PIRC grant, operating under a new name, Utah Family Partnership Network), includes on its Web site brief, concise descriptions of *NCLB* terms (e.g., a school report card, school choice, SES) and issues (e.g., testing requirements, what it means to not meet AYP).

Start With Existing NCLB Resources

When it comes to illuminating what *NCLB* offers for parents, the U.S. Department of Education, SEAs, and others have already developed many helpful publications and Web-based documents. In such cases, there is no need for a PIRC to reinvent the wheel. Instead, PIRC staff can focus their efforts on finding an avenue to get these resources to parents. So, for example, the Indiana Partnerships Center has posted on its Web site an information resource developed by the U.S. Department of Education that briefly, and in an easy-to-understand fashion, describes a school-parent compact, gives directions and a template for writing a compact, and provides question prompts (e.g., “How can we use the compact throughout the school year?”) for developing related action steps (e.g., use the compact as part of parent-teacher conferences). This PIRC also has posted a downloadable description from the Indiana State Board of Education of what a local parent involvement policy should include and how and to whom it should be distributed.

Ensure User-friendly Language and Format

Even for highly literate, well-educated parents, understanding how *NCLB* relates to them and their children can be challenging. For those who are not comfortably literate in English or who have little education, *NCLB* is virtually inaccessible in its original form, or even through the many articles about it that have been published in newspapers and magazines or via the Web. For these parents, it is essential that relevant aspects of the legislation be presented in easily understandable language and formats. Staff at these highlighted PIRCs suggest, for example,

using colorful graphics and charts; keeping communication of basic elements to one page each, if possible; gearing language to approximately a sixth- to eighth-grade level as many newspapers do (based on the education level of their readership); and using a variety of parents, especially those in targeted communities or populations (e.g., those for whom English is a second language), to review materials as they are being developed.






To help parents understand and navigate the legislation, ADI’s PIRC developed *A Parent Guide to No Child Left Behind*,⁹ which explains parents’ rights and responsibilities under the legislation and has been offered in both Spanish and English. The guide’s narrative is broken up by colorful textboxes that either provide helpful tips for parents (e.g., how to assist with homework) or suggest questions parents might want to ask local educators. The guide has been disseminated through home visits, workshops, mailings, and downloads from the Internet, and more than 200,000 copies have been distributed to date, both within Illinois and nationwide via Internet downloads.

Similarly, the Indiana Partnerships Center developed and distributes *A Parent’s Guide to Understanding NCLB & P.L. 221*¹⁰ (P.L. 221 being Indiana’s education accountability act). This eight-page guide, brightly colored with simple, appealing graphics, starts by very briefly introducing the laws and defining a few key terms (e.g., AYP). But most of its information is displayed in a chart laid out according to key concepts covered by the laws, including, for example, academic goals, teacher qualifications, student assessment, accountability, and school safety. (See fig. 3, Indiana Partnerships

Center: Excerpt From *A Parent's Guide to Understanding NCLB and P.L. 221*, below.) Each row has four columns: *NCLB*, P.L. 221, "What it means to parents," and "Where to find more information." So, for example, on the general topic of highly qualified teachers, the chart explains what the two laws (i.e., *NCLB* and P.L. 221) dictate and, then, in the what it means column, explains that parents have the

right to ask for information about their children's teachers, including whether they have completed state requirements for licensure and certification, for example. The last column provides the names of (and Web site addresses for) several additional sources of information on the topic. This guide, too, is offered in both Spanish and English.

Figure 3. Indiana Partnerships Center: Excerpt From *A Parent's Guide to Understanding NCLB and P.L. 221*

	NCLB (No Child Left Behind)	PL221 (Public Law 221)	What it means to parents	Where to find more information
Academic Goals (Standards)	All schools in the United States must maintain a list of the academic goals for each grade level. 	Indiana schools have education goals at every grade level (K-12) for reading, writing, math, science and social studies.	Every year parents should have access to the "Indiana Academic Standards," which outlines specific goals for core subject areas by grade level.	Parents can request a copy of the academic goals from their child's school. They can also be found online at: www.indianastandards.org . The site also provides additional information that parents might find helpful.
Teacher Qualifications	By 2005-2006, all teachers must have a degree in the area they teach, and be licensed in that area and grade level that they teach. Teachers that fulfill these requirements are considered "highly qualified."	Core subject teachers in Indiana must be "highly qualified." 	Parents have the right to ask for information about their child's teacher(s), including information about: "completion of state requirements for licensure and certification; emergency or other provisional status; educational background;" and the qualifications of the teachers' aides. 	Information about "highly qualified" teachers is available at: www.nclb.gov/Newsletter/20030201.html .
	Paraprofessionals (teachers' aides) must have attended at least two years of college, pass state testing and may not teach except under the supervision of a highly qualified teacher. 	Indiana requires testing for paraprofessionals who do not have at least two years of college. Indiana is using the Educational Testing Service (ETS) ParaPro Assessment for paraprofessionals and is currently preparing test preparation activities.		Information about ETS ParaPro Assessment can be found at: www.ets.org/parapro . 

In addition to using written materials, the Utah Family Center has packaged *NCLB* information in two DVDs, one about testing and accountability and the other about SES and school choice under *NCLB*. To help ensure that the DVDs would be easily understood by parents, the written scripts were shown to advisory board members (including parents). Rather than trying to distribute the DVDs directly to individual parents, the center has relied on its own trainers to use them at site council trainings and advisory board meetings and on school boards and community organizations, such as parent-teacher organizations, to reach additional audiences. At the time this guide was researched, the center was working on Spanish versions of the DVDs. In hopes of imparting *NCLB*-related information in a more engaging and understandable way, the Indiana Partnerships Center has been developing a DVD that highlights parents discussing *NCLB* together. DVDs are a particularly helpful tool for informing parents who cannot or do not read, and when used with a group of people—at a meeting of a parent-teacher organization, a school staff meeting, or a church-based gathering, for example—they oftentimes prompt questions and discussion that can be addressed or facilitated, respectively, by a PIRC staff member or volunteer.

One method for ensuring that information is presented in a meaningful way for the intended audience(s) is to have it reviewed by members of the targeted group(s). The Indiana Partnerships Center has convened parent focus groups, as well as its parent advisory council, to review materials and weigh in on their relative user-friendliness. Center staff present draft materials and ask participants to weigh in on whether the materials are understandable and interesting. Thus, those who live in the communities

for which the materials are intended provide feedback prior to the materials being completed and distributed. IDRA also has its materials vetted, asking community organizations that work with parents in both rural and urban areas (rural southern Texas usually includes Mexican immigrants whereas urban areas usually include immigrants from many countries in Latin America) to convene groups of parents to give feedback on whether the information is clear.

Make Performance Data Meaningful

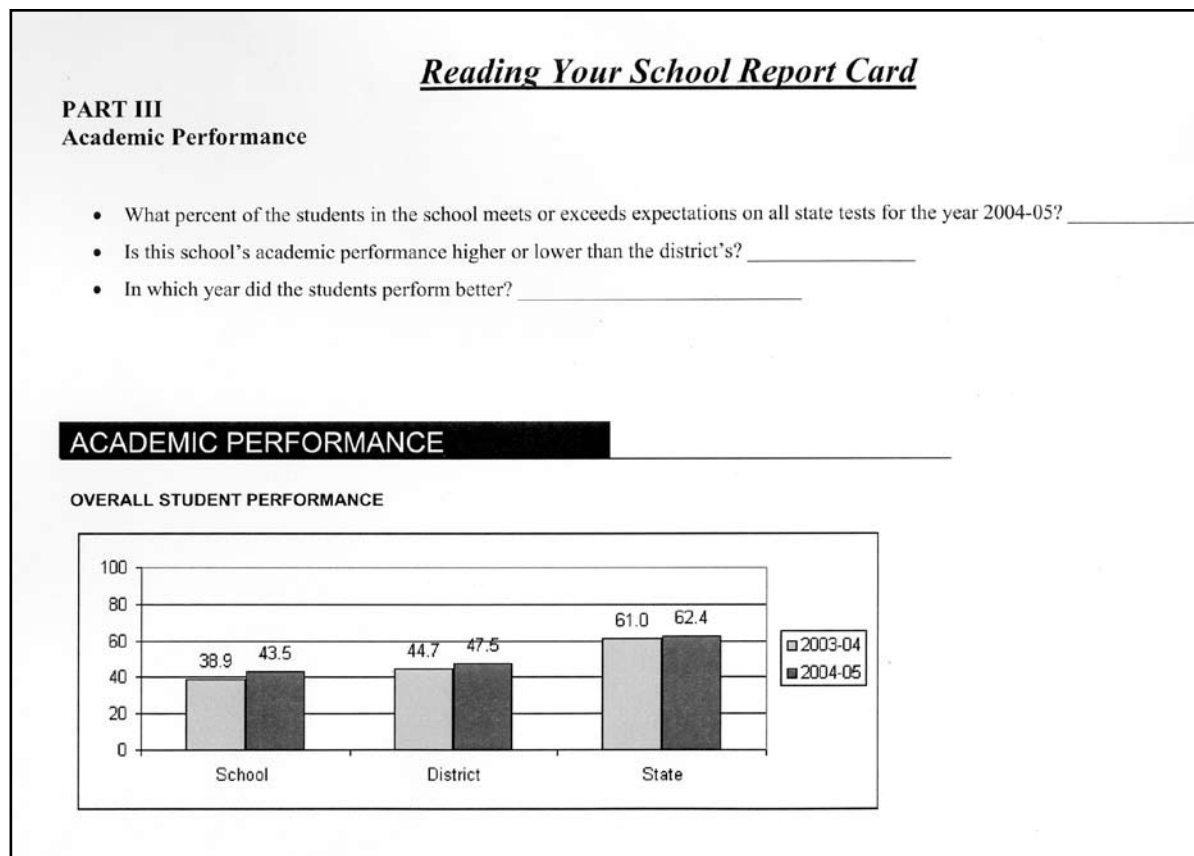
Parents' understanding of how their children's school and district are performing overall is considered an essential component of *NCLB*. Thus, the law requires that parents receive report cards (i.e., a report card on the school or district, not the child) specifying at the school or district level how students have performed on mandated standardized tests, with student performance broken down by student subcategories, such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and limited English proficiency status. In addition, the parents of children whose school or district has not made AYP must be notified promptly and be informed of their options (e.g., SES, school choice) before the beginning of the school year or term in which choice or SES options will be offered.

To help parents understand performance data, ADI's PIRC developed a workshop that walks parents through a school report card to explain its different components. To make the experience more meaningful, parents are asked to bring their own school's report card. The workshop covers the topics of demographics, academic performance, and AYP. After looking at each section of the report card, parents

are informally quizzed on elements of their own school's report card, such as whether the school is making progress toward achieving AYP in math (see fig. 4, Academic Development Institute: Excerpted Report Card Guide to Help Parents Understand Student Performance at the School, District, and State Levels, below). As the parents walk through this process they are able to ask the facilitator to clarify information

and answer any related questions they might have. This training on reading and interpreting the data has been offered in *NCLB* workshops conducted by community-based organizations contracted by ADI, as well as in a range of other contexts where it might be useful, such as in setting up school community councils (i.e., ADI's version of school site councils, which deal directly with school policy).

Figure 4. Academic Development Institute: Excerpted Report Card Guide to Help Parents Understand Student Performance at the School, District, and State Levels



Tips for Making Education-Related Information Available And Understandable

- Do not reinvent the wheel—check for existing publications and tools to distribute.
- Create reader-friendly *NCLB* materials that are short, concise, clearly written, and well designed.
- Have representative parents review draft materials for reader friendliness before the materials are produced.
- Create informational DVDs for nonreading parents and group sessions.
- Create workshops, guidance sessions, and Web sites to help parents understand the relevant issues.

Similarly, the Indiana Partnerships Center has developed a guide that walks parents through the Indiana Accountability System for Academic Progress Web site. This Web site includes information on the Indiana academic standards, accountability, professional development, school data (including performance data), school improvement planning, and the state performance profile. The guide is designed specifically to help parents understand the school data portion of the Web site, and it does this by providing a graphic of each relevant Web site page with large red arrows pointing to where parents should click on the screen. Hints like “scroll over bars on this graph to find out how many students took and passed this exam” and little messages—such as “Don’t panic!!!”—are interspersed throughout the guide. Finally, the guide includes a phone number to the Indiana Partnerships Center so parents can call with

questions. This guide is downloadable from the center’s Web site and is distributed at *NCLB* workshops as well.

IDRA has taken another approach: engaging a group of computer-savvy students from the lower Rio Grande Valley—the Youth Education Tekies—to provide computer training and support for their parents and other adults in the community. A chief goal for these students, ranging from sixth grade to college, is to get their adult “students” proficient enough so they can access online information about their children’s schools, districts, SEAs, and *NCLB*. At one of IDRA’s leadership training sessions for parents and educators, the Tekies guided participants through the Texas Education Agency Accountability System Web site, where school, district, and state accountability data are posted. Participants were given worksheets instructing them to find their children’s school on the Web site, locate particular data about the school, compare different subsets of the data (e.g., performance scores for Latinos and African-Americans), and reflect on their findings. The Tekies coached parents, some of whom had never used a computer, as they carried out the tasks. IDRA’s PIRC director says the intergenerational program also is intended to support students’ development as active participants in their communities.

Getting in Touch with Parents Statewide

States and PIRCs have the challenge of ensuring that *all* parents statewide receive information. Thus, PIRCs need to consider how to effectively communicate with parents and other constituents who are beyond easy geographic reach.

No matter where a PIRC locates its office(s), some portion of its targeted audience(s) is likely to live too far away to easily take advantage of any office-based meetings, trainings, or other resources. Conventional methods for delivering information long-distance, such as direct mailing or sending information to schools and asking that it be sent home with students, may be successful in reaching some parents. But even when written materials are sent in the home language of a family, this method is not reliable in reaching or being effective for all parents, especially those most in need of the information. Moreover, these methods preclude parents being able to ask questions, and PIRCs have no way of knowing whether the information has been understood. Thus, while such communication strategies may have a place, each of the five PIRCs selected for this guide chose to augment them. This section covers how PIRCs are using technology and school-based “parent centers” (not to be confused with the PIRCs themselves) to make information easily available for as many parents as possible.

Use Technology to Communicate

The highlighted PIRCs are using technology to extend their reach: Web sites because they offer important flexibility in communicating complex and, often, evolving information, and videoconferencing because it enables PIRCs to bring far-flung parents and educators together without travel costs.

Web sites. Many education Web sites discuss accountability standards and other *NCLB*-related information. The trick in creating a useful Web site for parents is to make sure the information is both relevant and clear to a wide range of

people. To help ensure that its Web site is as useful as possible for its intended audience(s), the Indiana Partnerships Center has included a survey on the bilingual site. The survey includes both user satisfaction questions and a prompt to find out what kinds of additional information parents and educators would like on the site. In addition to considering the responses as it continues to develop its site, the center sends users a packet with information related to their stated interests. Initially, very few users completed the survey. So when the PIRC recently revamped its Web site, the survey link was renamed “Freebies,” and those clicking on the link learned that if they completed the survey they could receive books, kids-eat-free coupons from local restaurants, a tote bag, or informational CDs about parent involvement. Subsequent to this change, the center began receiving about 10 responses a week from both educators and parents. The information compiled from these surveys is used to continue tailoring the Web site and center offerings to more closely meet the needs of its client base.

At the time the information for this guide was researched, IDRA was about to launch a Web site aimed at helping parents decipher and understand accountability data for schools across Texas. As planned, the Web site would allow the public to access test scores from all the schools in the state, as well as to get additional school information, such as the percentage of bilingual staff and the percentage of resources dedicated to special education. Additionally, the Web site would offer a bulletin board to field questions, with responses offered in both Spanish and English. (The organization is planning eventually to have the whole site available in both languages.) As part of its planning

process, IDRA staff was working with parents at ARISE, a community-based organization serving Latino immigrants, to vet the information on the Web site and, thereby, ensure its usefulness. The biggest challenge they said they were facing was to translate the education jargon into terms that are meaningful for the lay person; in doing so, they drew heavily from their conversations with the ARISE parents.

Videoconferences. Although Web sites often include chat rooms and sometimes even have video capabilities, these technologies do not offer the immediacy of human contact and dialogue available in face-to-face gatherings. Videoconferences provide a middle ground, allowing people to come together and feel more personally connected without having to travel long distances. Years ago, IDRA staff started meeting via videoconferences and began to consider how this technology also might be used for training and information dissemination to the public. In 2000, IDRA received funding from a foundation for its PIRC to start this practice in collaboration with other parent or family outreach organizations, such as Project READ and the IDEA South Central Collaborative for Equity. Since then the PIRC has been hosting live, interactive videoconferences whose purpose is to bring together educators and parents from across the state to discuss education issues, such as *NCLB*. In doing this, the PIRC benefits from the fact that each of Texas's 20 regional education service centers, arms of the Texas Education Agency charged with helping school districts to improve student achievement, already had videoconferencing equipment and that, increasingly, individual schools have video technology that allows them to join in. The sessions tend to be two hours long, with presentations given in both English

and Spanish. Conference materials are sent in advance to each participating location.

A chief benefit of convening so many people from so many different regions is that in addition to building a common information base, participants can share stories, ideas, and advice. A sense of extended community reinforces the notion that participants are not working alone on these issues. One member of a focus group for this guide who had participated in an IDRA-facilitated videoconference is the executive director of a local nonprofit organization and, also, the mother of two boys enrolled in Texas public schools. She said, "Sometimes I feel a sense of hopelessness, but to know everyone in Texas is going through the same thing is wonderful!" The director of IDRA's PIRC says he thinks the videoconferences have produced a "leveling effect" because parents and educators from all over Texas are talking and listening to each other as equals.

Establish and Coordinate Conveniently Located Parent Centers

For four of the PIRCs highlighted in this guide—the Indiana Partnerships Center, the Utah Family Center, and the PIRCs run by ADI and IDRA—making sure parents have a conveniently located place where they can pick up *NCLB*- and other education-related resources and can meet and talk with other parents or with school staff is seen as a basic strategy for further engaging parents in efforts to improve education. Such places are broadly referred to as *parent centers* (spelled in lower-case and, as noted earlier, not to be confused with the PIRCs themselves). Although some PIRCs operate some sort of parent center at their office, it is more common to

have such centers located at a school or in the general vicinity of several schools. The point is to locate them as conveniently as possible for parents. In some instances, PIRCs operate parent centers themselves, as the Utah Family Center has done, for example. In other instances, they encourage and support schools to set up and operate their own parent centers, as the Indiana Partnerships Center and the ADI and IDRA PIRCs have done.

Some school-based parent centers consist of little more than a bookshelf of materials in the waiting room of a school office; others are more elaborate and self-contained, with comfortable seating and coffee at the ready, books and other materials that can be taken or checked out, and a computer, VCR or DVD player available, which visitors can use for informational purposes. Some have no staff, some are run by a changing cast of volunteers, and some have an actual staff member. Minimally, the purpose of such parent centers is to distribute information and to make parents feel welcome at a school or, if the center is located off campus, to make them feel more comfortable with the U.S. education system in general. Ideally, every school would house its own parent center, but given the limited resources of most schools (including time, funding, and space), parent centers are less common than many educators and parents alike would want.

Some PIRCs, such as the Indiana Partnerships Center, have stepped in to help schools establish and coordinate school-based parent centers that offer a range of parent-friendly materials as well as workshops and trainings on topics of interest to that parent clientele. Indiana now has some 75 parent centers, most in Indianapolis Public

Schools (IPS). This is a district whose superintendent has required that all Title I elementary and middle schools develop parent centers staffed with trained “parent liaisons” responsible for setting up and maintaining the centers, including working directly with parents to help them get needed education information. At the time the study underlying this guide was conducted, the district had asked the Indiana Partnerships Center to train 57 new parent liaisons for this role. Initially, IPS’s parent centers were funded through contributions from local companies and other small grants, but the district has since begun using Title I funds to support the liaison positions. The Indiana Partnerships Center uses its PIRC grant (as opposed to additional funding it has received from other sources, such as private foundations) to provide technical assistance for the centers along with *NCLB* materials and other resources for stocking the centers.

The experience of the Indiana Partnerships Center suggests that school-based parent centers that get the most use tend to be located in an easily accessible area, close to a school’s front door or parking lot, for example. However, if an optimal location is not afforded—one IPS parent center is located in a former broom closet—just remember that it is more important to have a concrete area where parents know they can go to get the help they need. As the associate director of the Indiana PIRC notes, “Just do it! Just open the space and don’t worry.” (See “Setting Up a Parent Center” on p. 24.)

IDRA’s PIRC also works with representatives of schools and community organizations, and parent outreach personnel who request help in setting up parent centers, and it has helped establish 30 centers over the past eight years. The PIRC

Setting Up a Parent Center

For those interested in establishing a school-based parent center with *NCLB*- and other education-related resources available for parents to use on site or to check out, the Indiana Partnerships Center created a simple checklist for what needs to be done. The following is adapted from that checklist:

Steps for setting up a parent center:

- Seek approval from the school principal.
- Schedule a planning session (expect it to last about two hours) bringing together interested parents and educators to:
 - > Create a vision statement;
 - > Establish goals;
 - > Create a framework for implementation;
 - > Set a budget;
 - > Plan the physical setup of the center; and
 - > Identify and organize what resources it will offer.
- Identify and, if necessary, train the coordinator who will need to deal with inventory, help parents use the computer, locate volunteers, and establish committees.
- Find the things needed to furnish the center, including lamps, table, phone, computer, printer, coffee pot, and filing cabinets.
- Contact the nearest PIRC to get resources for the center.

offers this service as a technical assistance package that includes three days of planning and follow-up that, similar to the Indiana Partnerships Center, includes supplying materials for the center, training for setup of the center, and training on using computers to find pertinent parent resources. The services also include a choice of many Spanish-English trainings, such as parent leadership training, an invitation to participate in local and regional parent leadership networking meetings, and training of trainers for parents and parent-involvement staff to help plan and conduct workshops for parents.

The Utah Family Center takes a slightly different approach. From the center's inception, its executive director has recognized the need for PIRC-established and -operated satellite offices that would serve as parent centers so parents in other parts of the state, particularly in its more isolated areas, can have easy access to needed resources. The PIRC has operated with a central office in Salt Lake City. At the time of this study, the office was located in space donated by the PIRC's fiscal agent, the Utah Parent Teacher Association, in its own building. In their common space, the two organizations ran a parent resource center. However, the PIRC also runs nine satellite offices as parent centers elsewhere in the state, seven of them housed in local schools, and all of them staffed with a paid coordinator. All of the satellite centers offer the same baseline information and resources for parents, as well as additional resources or services tailored to local needs.

The first six of Utah's nine satellite centers opened in 1998 and were fully funded (including the coordinators) through the Utah Family Center's original PIRC grant. In 2002, the center received an additional PIRC grant and was able

to add three more centers, for which it budgeted to cover only materials and resources, not coordinators. The goal was to have communities take more ownership, with local districts figuring out how to fund coordinators. Districts stepped up: one center has been staffed with a worker from Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA); the coordinator position at another center, located next to a low-performing school, has been funded partly by the local district's Title I money and partly by the Utah Family Center's PIRC grant; and the position at the third center has been paid for by school-level Title I funds. Materials for all of the satellite centers are covered through PIRC funds, and the facilities are all donated by local districts.

Through the Solid Foundation (SF), the ADI PIRC's cornerstone program for building community and parent involvement at a school, the PIRC has been helping participating schools set up a family resource library. With accommodations ranging from a few comfortable chairs and a bookcase located in a hallway to an entire classroom dedicated to parent resources, these libraries focus primarily on providing materials that parents can use in working with their children (e.g., *NCLB* information, books on tape with cassette players, lists of community resources, parenting books, family games). In addition, some of the larger libraries serve as places for parents to convene informally or for parents and staff to come together for Solid Foundation trainings. Although various school staff (e.g., teachers, the principal) and volunteer parents ensure that the centers are organized and well stocked, the resource libraries do not have permanent staff available to answer questions or help parents find resources. Instead, they function as lending libraries that operate on the honor system.


Tailored services. One benefit to having parent centers as localized as possible is that they can be tailored to meet the needs of their respective communities. For example, each Utah center has a local advisory board to help identify community needs and how best to meet them within the limits of funding and other resources. (See fig. 5, Utah Family Center: Brochure From Satellite Parent Center With Tailored Services, on p. 26.) These advisory boards are made up of a range of people varying slightly from center to center, but usually including four to five parents; the regional director of the Utah PTA; a representative from the district superintendent's office, who might be the Title I director; and, if there is a university nearby, a representative of it as well. Broad membership on a parent center advisory board helps ensure that a center understands and serves the needs of its community.

In serving economically disadvantaged populations, PIRCs invariably run into families in need of much more than the education-related information and services that PIRCs normally provide. Some families need help with much more basic needs. While generally speaking, other types of agencies (e.g., public, nonprofit, church-based) are set up to address those needs, some PIRCs have seen a role for themselves, recognizing a link between family conditions and children's school performance. For example, parents who do not have jobs may have more trouble providing healthy food, let alone school supplies; homes without showers or washing machines cannot ensure children's cleanliness or health; and no access to a telephone limits communication between home and school. As one PIRC staff member notes, "If the parents feel better, the child feels better." Thus, a number of PIRC-facilitated parent centers offer resources not

Figure 5. Utah Family Center: Brochure From Satellite Parent Center With Tailored Services (inside panels from open three-fold brochure)

**Granite School District Family Center
facilitates student learning by providing
support to District families**

<p>PROVIDE TRAINING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parenting classes • Parent Literacy classes • Parental rights and procedures • Employment Services • Tobacco/Substance Abuse • Granite Peaks Lifelong Learning • Early Childhood Classes • Family Education Classes 	<p>REDUCE BARRIERS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food Pantry • HEAT Program • Lending Library • Computer lab/Internet access • Tutoring • Translation Services 	<p>MAKE REFERRALS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Granite Peaks Adult Education GED, ESL, HS completion • Health Services • Medicaid/CHIP Services • Preschool Services • Consultant for parents with students with disabilities • Mental Health Services • Refugee Outreach Worker • ESL Parent Liaison
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A collaborative effort by Granite School District, Utah Family Center, PTA
and Community Action Program

directly related to education. For instance, centers in both Indiana and Utah offer resume and job-placement help for parents.

Utah's Monument Valley Satellite Center, located on a Native American reservation in southern Utah, has gone a considerable step further, addressing families' basic needs through a variety of services that have included use of an on-site shower and washer and dryer, use of a telephone (for parents with a phone card),

and use of one of the center's six computers for writing resumes, printing documents, and searching for information and jobs.

Connecting With Hard-to-Reach Parents

As noted earlier, PIRCs must spend at least half of their PIRC grant to serve parents who are severely economically or educationally disadvantaged, a category that includes those

who are Spanish-speaking migrant parents; those who are homeless; those who may have an address but no telephone, let alone a computer; and those who cannot read. How PIRCs do so varies, depending on the needs of the populations they are trying to reach. For example, IDRA's PIRC partners with a Head Start program that provides or brokers a range of supportive services (e.g., dental, medical, mental health, nutrition) to migrant farmworker families; the PIRC supplies the Head Start program with information about education rights and *NCLB*, which the program, in turn, gives to the families with which it works. The Indiana Partnerships Center has developed partnerships with homeless shelters in the state to distribute *NCLB* information, and it places informational spots on Spanish-language radio and television to reach Spanish-speaking parents. For several PIRCs, home visits have been a major outreach strategy because liaisons can target services to meet families' specific needs.

Facilitate Home Visits

For a variety of reasons, many parents never make it to their children's school, which, for many, means they never make it to a parent center. Their work schedule may preclude coming during standard school hours and for parents working two jobs, as many must do, even extended hours might not help. Parents also may stay away because they had a negative experience in their own education and may be mistrustful of educators. For immigrant families whose documentation may not be complete, staying away from school may be part of a general effort to keep a low profile. To serve such parents, some PIRCs promote the strategy of home visits through which parents

Tips for Reaching Parents Statewide

- Develop Web sites and use videoconferencing to reach larger and more dispersed audiences.
- Help establish parent centers in or near schools across the state that inform and invite the participation of parents in the education of their children. If a center serves a high-poverty population, it should also provide services as possible that help meet families' basic needs (e.g., job-hunting assistance, including access to computers for writing resumes, telephones, showers, and washing machines).
- Open satellite PIRC centers across the state that can assess and address the needs of local or regional constituents.

receive personalized communication geared to their needs. Equally important, home visits allow two-way communication with parents able to ask questions and discuss concerns.

The Utah Family Center trains parent liaisons across the state to make home visits. Since Utah is now a multilingual, multicultural state, liaisons must be aware of and prepared to address cultural differences, language barriers, socioeconomic issues, and social factors that affect parents' ability to be involved in their children's education, such as substance abuse and incarceration. Often home visits provide the best means to assess the needs of families and then to tailor communications and services to meet their needs. The Utah Family Center helps prepare liaisons for these visits through group trainings on a range of topics, including cultural competency and *NCLB*.

Important as it is to provide effective liaison training, some PIRCs have found that choosing the right liaison candidate to begin with makes all the difference. For example, the Utah Family Center recruited a medicine man on a reservation served by one of the satellite offices to be a liaison. In addition to being highly respected within the communities in that area, he is savvy about what types of communications will be most effective for a community where few families have a phone. When the school in which he was based was on verge of not making AYP, this liaison conducted over 100 home visits to talk with parents about the value of student attendance and testing, explaining that parents needed to make sure their children came to school so the children would learn well and test well, for both the children's sake and the school's sake.

This same satellite center also has helped facilitate improved communication between the local high school staff and reservation parents, many of whom, in addition to not having phones, have no access to transportation or, in some cases, even to running water or electricity. In hopes of making connections between these far-flung parents and their children's teachers, the principal decided that every Friday for five weeks during the summer she would bus her staff to a different area of the reservation. Each visit culminated in a light meal or snack at the home of one of the families, with arrangements made by and the food supplied by satellite center staff. The principal describes these visits as "truly eye-opening" for her staff, many of whom had no prior understanding of the conditions in which their students lived or the struggles their families faced. The staff's new awareness helped them be more understanding when

students came to school with no homework done, were late for class, or were distracted; it also helped staff focus guidance and interventions in a more informed, helpful way.

In the IPS, where all Title I elementary and middle schools are now required by the district to have a parent liaison, the Indiana Partnerships Center facilitated the first year of liaison training, in collaboration with the district's Title I office and Bridges to Success, a United Way program dedicated to building healthy school communities. The training, approximately 50 hours over the course of a year, took place one day each month, and one of the key topics was how to connect with hard-to-reach parents, using such strategies as making home visits. Some participants were already experienced in conducting home visits, either because they had worked as a liaison at an individual Title I school before the position became mandatory or because they had worked in another social service-type job prior to becoming a liaison. Their feedback on the training was that they had found the home-visitor module especially important because they had already experienced challenges in attempting this type of outreach.

The Indianapolis liaison training emphasizes an asset-based approach in which, to establish trust and make parents feel comfortable, the liaison highlights positive things in his or her introductory conversation with parents in their home: They first thank the parents for letting them come, then compliment them on the hard work they are doing with their children. They then begin to ask open-ended questions about the children and parents, and then invite the parents to participate at school in ways they might feel comfortable (e.g., volunteering

in the classroom, chaperoning field trips). Finally, they ask if the parents have any questions about school or their children's education in general and then set a date to call or visit again. A role-playing exercise in which liaisons trade off playing parents and liaisons helps training participants model and practice the approach.

Partner With Community-based Organizations


Community-based organizations can be invaluable in helping PIRCs connect with hard-to-reach parents. Parents who for any reason have lost trust in their local education system may be more receptive to information delivered by an organization in which they *do* have confidence, such as their church or local Boys and Girls Club. Also, such organizations tend to have more intimate knowledge of the needs and concerns of their particular constituents and, therefore, understand how to reach them. For a PIRC with a statewide mandate, partnering with other organizations also makes sense as a way to leverage its own limited resources. By working with or through a community- or faith-based organization, PIRCs can exponentially increase the number of parents reached.

To lay the ground for this method of extended outreach, the Family Works (a program of the nonprofit Gaithersburg-based Family Service Agency) that was funded as a PIRC in 2003 to serve Maryland, cohosted an *NCLB* summit intended to solicit the help of local community-based organizations. (See fig. 6, *The Family Works: Invitation to Education Summit for Community-based Agencies in Maryland*, on p. 30.) The one-day summit brought together 60 participants from 15 parent-, faith-, and

community-based organizations to inform them about the intent of *NCLB* as it pertains to parent involvement and to enlist their help in disseminating this information to families across the city of Baltimore. In addition to presenting general information, the Family Works produced four topic-specific breakout sessions on parent involvement, understanding your school's report card, public school choice, and supplemental educational services.

ADI's PIRC also has seen value in enlisting other organizations to further its reach to parents. This PIRC has contracted with five community- and faith-based organizations across Illinois to help distribute and facilitate understanding of *NCLB* information in the communities they serve. The initial contracting organizations (e.g., Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Peoria, Christian Women of the New Wave) were chosen for a variety of factors, among them, their geographic location, the needs of the communities they serve, and their reputations for communicating well with their communities. Using its grant funds, the PIRC contracted with these organizations to provide *NCLB* workshops and related guidance sessions for parents that would serve a minimum number of families annually. The three-hour *NCLB* workshops include an ADI-developed community curriculum, materials, and resource guide with general *NCLB* information that the organizations supplement with data and information from their local district. The guidance sessions usually are conducted for parents who already have attended the workshop and have follow-up questions, such as: What do I need to do as a parent? What are my individual choices? Who do I talk to at the district? These sessions offer information tailored to the specific needs of the participating families.

Figure 6. The Family Works: Invitation to Education Summit for Community-Based Agencies in Maryland



Join Us For ...

**A One-Day
Educational Summit
for
Parent Advocates**

Thursday, April 27, 2006
8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Hyatt Regency Baltimore
300 Light Street
Baltimore, MD 21202

PARTICIPATION BY INVITATION ONLY
ADVANCE REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED

Please RSVP by Friday, April 21, 2006

presented by:

U.S. Department of Education
Maryland State Department of Education
The Family Works at the
Family Services Agency

To prepare these organizations for their role as trainers and guidance counselors, the PIRC has brought them together to train three times a year (for five hours per session) in Lincoln. The first training covered *NCLB* content and trained the organizations' representatives in the processes for leading workshops and guidance sessions; the following two trainings that first year addressed challenges the organizations were facing in carrying out their work with parents and offered continued education on *NCLB*. In subsequent years, the trainings have played more of a support role and have been used for participating organizations to network and to go over any changes in the law. (For additional information on PIRCs' use of partnerships to expand capacity, see "PIRCs Leverage Their Limited Resources," on p. 32.)

Promoting Cross-stakeholder Communication

If parents, educators, and other education stakeholders are to become partners in raising student achievement, these groups need to be able to talk with each other. Yet parents rarely have forums where they can speak openly with educators; educators rarely have opportunities to talk with representatives of community organizations or the business community; and so on. Finding ways that all those who care about and have a stake in improving education can communicate effectively with each other can only help.

Convene Diverse Stakeholders

In 2005 and 2006, IDRA's PIRC hosted three events—which it refers to as multi-sector con-

Tips for Connecting With Hard-to-Reach Parents

- Provide information and materials to community-based organizations that are in direct contact with hard-to-reach populations, such as homeless shelters, local Head Start programs, and faith-based organizations.
- Train liaisons to make home visits that are informed, targeted, and culturally sensitive.
- Help recruit liaisons who can easily integrate into the target community.
- Contract with community-based organizations to disseminate information.
- Host summits and trainings that bring community-based organizations from across the state together for train-the-trainers sessions.

venings—aimed at facilitating understanding and cooperation among various education stakeholders in Texas: a statewide summit on dropout prevention, a second summit on the current state of Latino education in the state, and a four-seminar investigation into disparities related to the success of Latino students and their access to higher education. The goal of these statewide meetings was to bring families and students together with business people, universities, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, policymakers, and community members to find ways to better educate the children of Texas, the majority of whom are Latino—a subgroup whose members are dropping out of school at disproportionate rates and scoring lower than their counterparts on state and local tests. Through these convenings, multiple stakeholders have learned about and discussed why so many students are

PIRCs Leverage Their Limited Resources to Expand Capacity

Partnering with community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, other parent involvement organizations, and schools, districts, and state education agencies is one approach that all five of the highlighted PIRCs have utilized to varying degrees. While some PIRCs, such as those operated by IDRA and ADI, effectively partner with their larger parent organization and draw resources from the larger staff and budgets, other PIRCs, such as the Indiana Partnerships Center and the Family Works in Maryland, only have staffs of five. All of the PIRCs have limited budgets. Partnerships allow PIRCs to leverage their services to reach more parents and educators and to offer a wider range of training and services than if they were relying only on their own staff.

The Utah Family Center offers a good example of what partnerships can offer: This PIRC invested in two partnerships intended to facilitate communication between students and their families. A partnership with the state parent-teacher association (PTA), which also initially served as its fiscal agent, enabled the PIRC to gain access easily to school communities: Principals with established PTAs have readily invited PIRC staff into their schools to conduct leadership and parenting training. The PTA newsletter, which is sent to schools statewide, usually has included an article by PIRC staff to update readers about *NCLB* and inform them about PIRC services and resources. In return, the center supplies PTA members with *NCLB* information for their own trainings and provides trainings for PTA members on updated *NCLB* policy.

A second key partner has been the Utah Parent Center, which is a state-funded program serving families of children with special needs and which, despite its very similar name, should not be confused with the PIRC itself (i.e., the Utah Family Center). The two organizations have worked hard to foster a relationship that leverages the strengths of each. Since Utah Parent Center staff have developed trusting relationships with parents of children with special needs across the state, they can easily bring new *NCLB* information to these parents, provided that staff stay current on the information and understand how it relates to their service population. This is where the Utah Family Center comes in: The PIRC supplies the Parent Center with *NCLB* materials and trains center staff in *NCLB* policy so that they can distribute it to their constituents.

not graduating and entering college, and the magnitude of the problem has been exposed. Participants assess the readiness for action in their respective communities and develop strategic action plans or “blueprints for action.” (See fig. 7, Intercultural Development Research Association: Checklist for Effective Action to Improve Education, on p. 33.)

San Antonio Secondary-Level Dialogues is a more localized parent and community engagement effort provided by IDRA’s PIRC, designed and facilitated by IDRA’s PIRC. The idea for the dialogues came to the PIRC director when he was facilitating professional development at a

local San Antonio high school to help teachers reach English as a Second Language (ESL) students. As he taught this class he realized there was a need for greater understanding among teachers, students, and their families. The dialogues, which bring together members of each of these groups and are carried out in both Spanish and English, were conceived to help generate this understanding. Conversations are framed by three rounds of questions designed to help the different stakeholders understand more about one another and to prompt discussion of critical education issues while establishing mutual trust and respect.

Figure 7. Intercultural Development Research Association: Checklist for Effective Action to Improve Education (Excerpted from IDRA’s publication, *A Community Action Guide: Seven Actions to Fulfill the Promise of Brown and Mendez*)

Checklist for Effective Action

	Not Evident	Somewhat Evident	Evident	Very Evident	Extremely Evident
Working Across Racial Groups					
1. We have experience working together across racial groups.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Working across groups has been successful in our community.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Working together across groups has had positive impact on access and inclusion for all children.	1	2	3	4	5
4. People recognize the benefit of working across racial groups.	1	2	3	4	5
5. People are willing to work together across racial groups to reap the benefits for all children.	1	2	3	4	5
6. There is readiness in our community to work across racial groups for all children.	1	2	3	4	5
Civil Rights					
7. Discrimination is still a concern in our community.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Communities are aware of their civil rights in education.	1	2	3	4	5
9. There have been incidents of community disruption due to violation of civil rights.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Our school system monitors civil rights in education.	1	2	3	4	5
Public Engagement					
11. Our schools engage parents and community at all levels of the educational system.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Schools have a mechanism in place to make policies and practices more understandable to the community.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Schools and community honor the knowledge, language and resources of the other.	1	2	3	4	5
14. All segments of the community feel valued and welcomed into schools.	1	2	3	4	5
15. The community and the school work together to resolve problems for their mutual benefit.	1	2	3	4	5
16. Schools and colleges actively reach out to parents and community.	1	2	3	4	5
Fair Funding					
17. Our schools are funded equitably across our communities.	1	2	3	4	5
18. Our schools have the funding needed for excellence.	1	2	3	4	5
19. Our schools look alike in terms of conditions and resources across our communities.	1	2	3	4	5
20. All of our children, regardless of where they live, have access to an excellent education.	1	2	3	4	5
21. All schools receive enough money for effective teaching and learning.	1	2	3	4	5

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A core group of 12 teachers has participated regularly since the dialogues' inception. The number of parents and students involved has fluctuated, but all those participating thus far have been English learners and have qualified for Title I services—categories of individuals that are commonly considered hard to reach for such engagement efforts. One way of trying to recruit additional families has been to offer students extra class credit if they attend with family members. At the dialogue meetings, which occur over dinner (provided with Title I funding, but which also can be handled as potlucks), participants are split into table groups and each group is given a translator and a recorder who documents key points that come up in the conversations. The use of question prompts (e.g., for parents, “As your child’s first teacher, what was something you enjoyed teaching him or her to do?”) are intended to spur conversations that will promote participants’ greater understanding of each other and of key education issues.

Similarly, the ADI PIRC’s Solid Foundation includes a Home Gatherings component designed to help parents and teachers bridge the communications gap. These one-hour gatherings, planned by the school community council and the school’s parent-education facilitator, are held at a parent’s house and facilitated by the host parent. The host parent and participating teachers are trained in facilitation skills by the parent-education facilitator. These gatherings bring together a group (of varying size) of parents and teachers to talk together about their respective responsibilities in educating children and how to work together to meet shared goals. Questions addressed in the gatherings might include: What is the parent’s (and conversely

the teacher’s) role in developing a student’s academic skills, study habits, and self-respect? Questions are directly linked to the school-parent compact and *NCLB*’s Title I requirements for parent involvement. ADI staff have found that communities respond differently to the gatherings: Some are excited while others are more reticent about trying them. But ADI is continuing to require all Solid Foundation schools to host at least one gathering in hopes that all schools will establish Home Gatherings as a lasting practice.

Help Parents Know What Questions to Ask And How to Ask Them

To help parents become more skilled communicators within the education system on behalf of their children, the Indiana Partnerships Center offers a question-development workshop. This training is based on the model of the nonprofit Right Question Project (RQP) in Cambridge, Mass., whose premise is that effective questioning is an essential tool for participating in a democracy. This three-hour workshop is intended to help parents learn how to identify essential issues related to their children’s education, formulate effective questions, and feel comfortable discussing those questions with their children’s teachers or others in the education system. The training includes activities that help parents generate (in groups of four to five) lists of questions that pertain to a topic, prioritize those questions, deepen their inquiry by taking the most important question and brainstorming additional, related queries, and, finally, prioritize the questions again so that parents can be ready to ask just a few essential questions. Parents are more likely to get thoughtful responses from educators if their own questions are well

thought out and targeted to meet their goals, which is what the RQP-modeled workshop helps them do.

The Indiana Partnerships Center staff has found the RQP workshop model to be particularly helpful in preparing parents with children with special needs to communicate with teachers, principals, and districts. A part-time special education coordinator hired by the PIRC facilitates these workshops for parents of children with special needs across the state. The basic RQP model is used, but the coordinator infuses information about individualized education plans (IEPs) throughout. She stresses parents' responsibility to identify the needs of their children and then uses the RQP process to show them how to prioritize and develop related questions to ask teachers, principals, and district administrators in order to get those needs met. In addition, the coordinator has developed an "express IEP" plan that includes critical information for teachers about the needs of a child, including a short description of the disability, transportation needs, and classroom needs. This express plan, derived from a template that parents fill out, gives busy teachers a quick picture of the child's needs.

In addition to this parent training, the Indiana PIRC offers facilitation training for parents, school staff, and community organizers who wish to provide RQP-type training for other parents. Those wanting to become facilitators must first attend a parent workshop (described in Part II of this guide) and commit to facilitating at least one parent workshop in their community.

Tips for Promoting Cross-Stakeholder Communication About Education Issues

- Convene groups of diverse stakeholders from across the state to discuss, get trained, and network about issues related to parent involvement in children's education.
- At the school level, bring together parents, teachers, and students to discuss key education issues of importance and interest to them.
- Facilitate workshops that help parents understand how to identify and ask the important questions regarding the education of their children that they need answered.

Moving From Information to Action

Once parents understand their rights, responsibilities, and opportunities in relation to their children's education, and once they know how to formulate and ask the right questions—and feel comfortable doing so—they are ready to better support and advocate for their own children. They also are more likely to feel at ease volunteering in their child's classroom or helping out occasionally by working on a specific schoolwide project (e.g., assisting with a fundraiser, participating in a cleanup day).

For some parents, this degree of involvement will feel sufficient. But some will want to do more. They may want to become school leaders, the ones who conceive and organize the special projects (e.g., a cultural celebration, a workshop on how to help with homework), who recruit additional volunteers, and who advocate for other students and families, not

just their own. Or they may want to get involved in education decision-making, participating in school governance, becoming a member of the school site council, or sitting on a district or state education committee or board. For these parents, more preparation can lead to greater effectiveness in their education-related

endeavors. The same holds true for educators who want to partner more actively with parents and be involved in joint decision-making. Part II of this guide addresses how PIRCs help prepare well-informed parents and educators for action and partnership.



PART II

The PIRCs' Role in Preparing and Supporting Parents And Educators to Take Action for Student Learning

With the exception of home visits aimed at reaching specific parents, the kind of information dissemination described in Part I tends to be a broad-brush effort to reach as many parents as possible. In contrast, the efforts described in this section tend to be more selective and more time- and resource-intensive, as is needed for activities designed to ready parents and educators for action rather than simply to inform them. Even recruiting participants, particularly parents who traditionally have not been involved and educators who might not view the need for parent involvement as a high priority, can be difficult and time-consuming. Providing a broad range of training to meet the needs of constituents across an entire state also is challenging and can be expensive. But as will be evident in this section, the highlighted PIRCs have found ways to successfully meet these challenges.

Because PIRCs have a broad mandate and operate with limited funding (and, therefore, some have only a few staff members), they tend to leverage their resources by working with and through other organizations for both recruitment and training. More and more frequently, PIRCs are taking a train-the-trainers approach in a variety of avenues, such as parent leadership training, liaison training, and

site council training. They also have begun working with the staff of education agencies who, in turn, train targeted school and parent populations with which they are in close contact. PIRCs also expend resources carefully, trying to assess in advance the kinds of training and other preparation needed in particular schools and districts so they can plan their own efforts accordingly.

Assessing Local Needs Related to Parent Involvement

The relative family-friendliness of a school refers to how inviting it feels to the families of its students: Do families feel they would be welcome to ask questions, to contribute somehow in their children's classroom, to make suggestions, or to otherwise support their children's education? The degree to which parents feel at ease in their children's school is influenced by such factors as who initially greets them and whether they are met with a smile, with a frown, or ignored entirely; whether there is a physical space for parents to meet and find information and resources related to the school and education in general; whether they receive timely information (e.g., about school events, student productions, upcoming assessments) on a regular basis, as in a weekly newsletter coming home with their children, for example; whether teachers and the principal seem open to questions or feedback; and whether the only time parents hear from anyone at school is when there is a problem with their child. Parents who have made an initial effort to come to school to meet their children's teachers and principal are less likely to return if their experience is not positive. On the other hand, if parents are enthusiastically invited into schools, warmly greeted, and engaged in ways that make them feel comfortable and assure them that their input and questions are valued, they may be willing to come back and become involved at levels they might not even have considered.

By assessing both parents' current thoughts on the climate of the school and staff feelings

about parent involvement, schools can get a better idea of how they need to improve in the area of family friendliness, and they can solicit targeted help from their PIRC. While personal interviews and focus groups can be used to solicit in-depth information about parent and staff attitudes, few schools can manage such intensive ways of soliciting information. Written surveys are a much more efficient method that can still yield good results. The act of conducting a survey is itself a parent-friendly message to parents that a school cares what they think. It gives both parents and staff a voice in articulating what works and what does not work in the particular school community as related to parent involvement. In yielding site-specific information, it offers important guidance. One parent noted when talking about the value of a school survey, "It gives us data about our actual community. It's not just something we got from someplace else *like* ours that may or may not really fit us."

Provide Surveys on Schools' Family Friendliness as a PIRC Service

While some schools and districts develop and conduct their own school surveys for various purposes, both the Indiana Partnerships Center and ADI's PIRC recognized that not all education agencies have this capacity. Six years ago the Indiana PIRC contracted with an outside agency to develop the "Are We Family Friendly?" survey for distribution to Indiana schools. This perception survey asks parents how comfortable they feel in the school; how informed they feel about their children's performance and how to help them; whether or not they feel invited to participate in the school's activities and at what level; and how

empowered they feel in addressing any issues and concerns they might have. Teachers, in turn, are asked how often and in what capacity parents are invited to participate in their children's education in the classroom and at home; how informed they keep the parents; whether they make home visits and go into students' communities; and how much they solicit information.

The PIRC's intent was to have schools across the state administer the survey, with the PIRC analyzing and feeding the results back to them. But over the years it had become clear that many schools were unable to ensure enough of a response to make the survey worthwhile; sending surveys home with students or mailing them to a family's home was not effective. In 2005, the new superintendent of IPS required that all Title I schools in the district administer the survey to assess their family friendliness. The Indiana Partnerships Center collaborated with IPS to revise the survey and, also, create a Spanish-language version.

To further ensure a greater parent response rate, parent liaisons were used to disseminate the survey. Given the nature of their work, which entails developing strong relationships with parents at their site, the liaisons seemed well positioned to encourage parents to respond to the survey, to answer their questions, to monitor survey returns, and to provide follow-up if parents need additional encouragement to respond. As a result of this approach, some 4,900 parents completed the survey. Equally important, 880 or 18 percent of the parent respondents were Spanish speakers, whose voices may have remained silent in the absence of a translated survey.

ADI also offers a school survey, which was first developed in 1996 in a project with the Regional Educational Laboratory at Temple University. The survey has evolved and expanded over the years; today, in addition to asking parents and teachers about parent-related issues at their school, it includes questions for principals. If the survey is administered for a high school, students also are included. The topics covered for parents and teachers are similar to those in the Indiana survey, while principals are asked more about what existing services and structures are already in place to support parent involvement: What types of written policies have been developed to promote parent involvement (e.g., homework policy, school-parent compact), what mechanisms exist to invite parents into the school (e.g., family nights, conferences), what resources are available at the school for parents (e.g., parent resource library, trainings), and what methods are used to communicate with parents (e.g., home visits, newsletters). (See fig. 8, Academic Development Institute: Principal Element From School Survey, on p. 40.) The survey is given to principals to administer to their school populations. ADI then analyzes the data and generates a detailed report, which is shared with the school community, administration, and faculty; the school board; parent organizations; and other interested parties.

Use Survey Results to Inform Parent-related School Practice

Both ADI and the Indiana Partnerships Center take steps to help ensure that survey results are easily understandable and are used by schools in meaningful ways. ADI's analysis of survey results report goes into considerable depth comparing and contrasting how parents and staff

Figure 8. Academic Development Institute: Principal Element From School Survey

Principal Survey

About Your School

Date: _____

Please answer the following questions about your school:

- Please check each of the following that is available in written form:

<input type="checkbox"/> School vision/mission statement	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent guide to school policies, programs
<input type="checkbox"/> School improvement plan	<input type="checkbox"/> Homework policy
<input type="checkbox"/> Personnel policy handbook	<input type="checkbox"/> Curriculum guide
<input type="checkbox"/> Student policy handbook	<input type="checkbox"/> Course/subject syllabi
- Please check the governance entities at your school and indicate the frequency with which they meet and typical length of each meeting.

	<u>Meetings Per Year</u>	<u>Hours/Minutes Per Meeting</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Building leadership team, site-based team	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Grade-level (or cluster of grades) teacher teams	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Subject-area (departmental) teacher teams	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Student discipline committee	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Student support team to review student progress and recommend placement/support options	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> School council including parent members	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	_____	_____

Family-School Connections

- Does your school have a parent or parent-teacher organization? (circle) YES NO
 If yes, how many times does the organization meet each school year? _____
 If yes, how many parents attend a typical meeting? _____
- How many parents in your school would you describe as "very active"? _____
- Does your school hold an open house? (circle) YES NO
 If yes, about what percent of students have a parent present at the open house? _____
- Does your school host parent-teacher conferences? (circle) YES NO
 If yes, how many times each school year? _____
 If yes, about what percent of students have a parent who attends? _____
 If yes, are students expected to attend? (circle) YES NO

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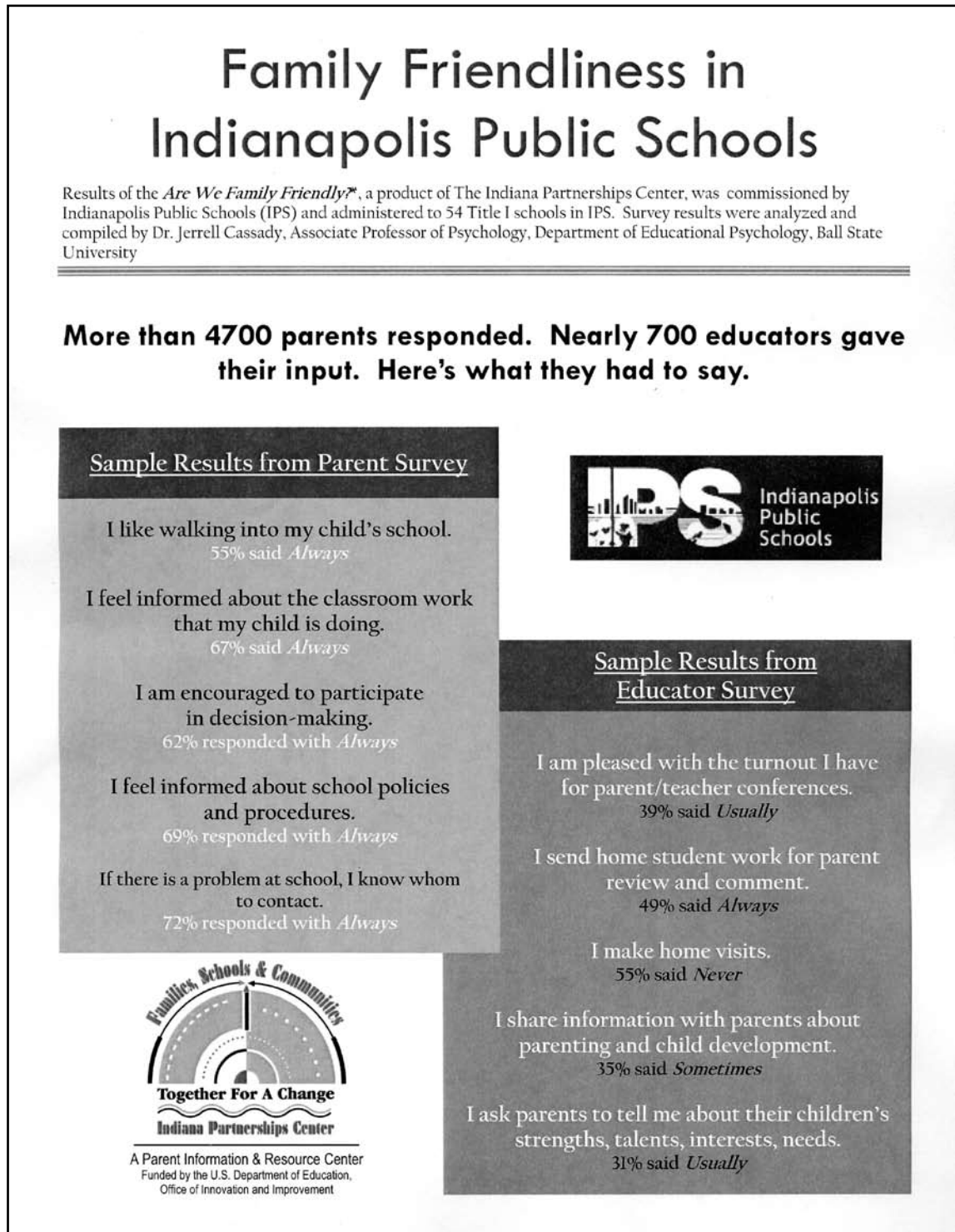
view issues and identifying areas where more work is needed to generate effective partnering between parents and school. Its purpose is to help school communities draw conclusions about areas of successes and challenges and to aid them in creating an action plan to strengthen *their community*. In addition to administering the survey, ADI offers a consulting service that includes up to three site visits: a pre-survey visit, a visit to review results and develop an action plan that is often tied to the goals of the school improvement plan, and a final visit three to six months later to assess progress. For Solid Foundation schools, the survey is administered at the beginning of the program and again at the end of the two-year Solid Foundation process. The results of these two surveys are then compared to identify areas of progress and areas still in need of improvement. ADI also administers progress reports twice a year for two years in December and June. These reports track implementation of the action plan through factors, such as how many home visits have been made.

At one school, survey results identified homework as a significant issue for many parents, although they did not necessarily agree on how much or what type of homework there should be. As a result, however, at the time of this study, the school was considering a new homework policy that might include, for example, ensuring that all teachers use what ADI has identified as a best practice approach to assigning homework (i.e., 10 minutes of homework in first grade, 20 minutes in second grade, 30 minutes in third grade, and so on) and sending parents tips on how to help with homework.

Because ADI employs an evaluator, the organization has the capacity to handle its survey analysis in-house. The Indiana PIRC does not have this same internal capacity, so it includes in its annual budget the funds to contract with an evaluator from a state university who analyzes the survey data and writes a report based on the findings. Committed to making findings accessible to those surveyed, including parents, the Indiana Partnerships Center has summarized survey findings into two pages of parent-friendly text with easy-to-read graphs and advice on next steps based on the findings. “We know from responses to our newsletter that people like things simple and they like information in graphs,” says the center director, adding, “Less is better.” In addition to preparing the written report, the evaluator consults with the PIRC about any implications for policy and practice, and the PIRC, in turn, incorporates this into its subsequent discussions with the client school or district. Once parents and educators realize that their voices have been heard and their input considered, they might be more willing to support any proposed changes in policy and practice. (See fig. 9, Indiana Partnerships Center: Example of Parent and Educator Survey Results Presentation, on p. 42.)

The analysis of IPS’s 2005–06 survey identified “parents as decision-makers” as the area most in need of improvement across the schools surveyed. Based on this information, individual schools began considering how to get parents more involved in school decision-making; the district started reviewing its parent involvement policies and supports; and, for its part, the Indiana Partnerships Center undertook a review of its leadership training.

Figure 9. Indiana Partnerships Center: Example of Parent and Educator Survey Results Presentation



Training Parent Liaisons

A parent liaison is considered a critical player in the effort to generate greater and more positive connections between parents and their children's school. In Title I schools across the country, such as those in IPS and in the state of Utah, there has been a movement to ensure that liaisons are in place to help facilitate parents' involvement in the education of their children. Depending on where they work, a liaison's duties might include (but not necessarily be limited to) any of the following: conducting home visits, staffing parent centers, distributing *NCLB* information, administering surveys about the family friendliness of schools, informing parents about their children's performance (both good and bad), providing training on parenting skills, and supplying information about how families can meet their basic needs (often liaisons distribute community resource lists identifying agencies that can help find housing, employment, etc.). The range of duties and importance of the role argue for comprehensive, ongoing training.

Deliver a Broad Curriculum to Liaisons

Liaison training is important for ensuring that liaisons are effective communicators with parents and have a clear understanding of the sometimes very technical information they need to communicate or about which they may be asked, such as matters related to school performance (e.g., how to interpret a school *NCLB*-required report card). In addition, training can help liaisons better define their role, can ensure greater consistency in the work of liaisons across schools, and can plant the seeds for an informal mutual-support network among liaisons within a district or region.

Tips for Assessing Local Needs Regarding Parent-Friendly Nature of Schools

- Create and distribute surveys about a school's relative family friendliness, to collect baseline data from parents and staff about what schools need to do to help parents get more involved in the education of their children.
- Recruit parent liaisons and community-based organizations to distribute the survey.
- Enlist the help of a local university to analyze data results.
- Use survey results to inform organizational practices.
- Distribute survey results to parents in clear language and format (e.g., using a short, concise summary with lots of graphics and color).

In the 2005–06 school year, IPS contracted with the Indiana Partnerships Center to facilitate a series of full-day training sessions for the district's new Title I parent liaisons. Held monthly, the sessions run in length from two to six hours, adding up to approximately 50 hours of training per year. In addition to the session on how to connect with hard-to-reach parents, mentioned in Part I (p. 26), topics include: creating family-friendly environments in IPS schools, research frameworks on effective parent engagement, *NCLB* and Indiana's Public Law 221, cultural competency, how parents can support math and reading achievement, and parents' roles in school-based decision-making.

The Utah Family Center also provides preparation and ongoing support for liaisons, through

The National Network of Partnership Schools

The National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS), based at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Md., is a project of the university's Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships, directed by research scientist Joyce Epstein. Schools that belong to the network create an "action team for partnerships," which includes but is not necessarily limited to parents, teachers, administrators, counselors, and students in the upper grades. The team then creates a one-year action plan, choosing activities that map to NNPS's framework for six major types of involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating in the community. NNPS staff have developed a one-day training workshop for schools wanting to take this approach. In addition to providing direct training workshops for schools, NNPS take a train-the-trainers approach to prepare PIRC staff, district staff, and others who, in turn, work directly with schools.

Members that join the network receive: the *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action*,¹¹ which includes a framework of the program, tips and tools for implementing the model, and assessment tools, along with information for sustaining partnership efforts; an invitation for key action team members to attend workshops and conferences at NNPS's Johns Hopkins headquarter; a semiannual newsletter designed to share examples of best practices, solutions to challenges, and guidelines for continuous progress in program development; an annual collection of promising practices; telephone, e-mail, and Web site assistance from NNPS staff; and additional tools and services.

As of September 2005, more than 1,000 schools, 130 local districts, and 16 state departments of education had joined the network, which supports district and state leaders in various ways, including hosting a spring workshop for representatives from new district and state members to prepare them to conduct training for schools' action teams for partnerships and other presentations. Because the growing number of schools requesting to join NNPS exceeds its capacity to meet their training and support needs on its own, this train-the-trainers approach is essential, allowing districts and states to support their own school-level partnership efforts.

quarterly training sessions on such topics as *NCLB*, cultural competency, conducting effective home visits, parents' roles in children's literacy development, as well as training to promote the National Network of Partnership Schools model, a school-based model that builds school community and promotes parent involvement (see above, "The National Network of Partnership Schools"). In addition to its standard liaison curriculum, the center provides ad hoc training as needed. For all training, liaisons travel to the PIRC's main office in Salt Lake City and are reimbursed for lodging, food, and transportation.

Through their trainings on cultural competency and literacy, among other things, Utah's

parent liaisons have become adept at identifying and responding to the needs of the families they serve. For example, recognizing that many parents, particularly new immigrants, are not literate themselves in English, liaisons have visited homes and modeled for parents a "book walk," in which a parent talks to a child about the pictures in a book and, based on the pictures, helps the child consider what the story might be about. Because variations on this form of storytelling are used in many cultures, this liaison service helps bridge home and school culture and makes parents feel that they can participate in helping their children even if the parents do not read or speak English.

ADI's PIRC has taken a different approach to the concept of parent liaisons. Working through ADI's Solid Foundation program, the PIRC helps participating schools to identify parents, teachers, and other school staff members who then are recruited and receive specific training for particular roles related to building a cohesive school community. For example, some may serve on the school community council while others may facilitate various parent courses. Another role is that of a home visitor, someone who helps implement specific family outreach projects planned by the school community council. One such project was a literacy-building effort in which, over the course of the summer, home visitors called on

all families of second-graders, giving them books for their children and helping parents understand how they could help their children with reading. Solid Foundation's home-visitor preparation includes presenting procedures for a home visit, role-playing conversations in a home with parents, and distribution of multiple tools for conducting a successful visit (e.g., a script for scheduling a home visit, home-visit reminder, reporting form). Using a parent feedback form, ADI surveys parents about their experiences with a home visitor and uses the feedback to plan future visits and training. (See fig. 10, Academic Development Institute: Form for Parent Feedback on Home Visitors, below.)

Figure 10. Academic Development Institute: Form for Parent Feedback on Home Visitors

PARENT FEEDBACK		
Please let us know what you thought about our visit.		
Name of Visitor: _____	Date: _____	
Your Child's School: _____		
City: _____		
	Please circle	
The visitor was friendly	YES	NO
The information was helpful to my family	YES	NO
I would like more visits like this one	YES	NO
I look forward to my connections with the school.	YES	NO
Comments:		
Thank you!		

Use Parents as Liaisons to Serve Families Of Special Needs Children

Champions Together, a program that focuses on serving and engaging parents of special needs students, has been a collaborative effort of ADI's PIRC and the Illinois Service Resource Center (ISRC), an Illinois State Board of Education technical assistance program funded with a grant under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*. The program offers training, as requested, for parents of children with disabilities (and who receive special education services) who want to serve as family liaisons—often as paid part-time liaisons—for other parents at their school whose children receive special education services. According to the program's brochure, the main purpose of having such a liaison is to “increase the comfort level of parents and establish positive relationships between parents and schools.” Although ISRC representatives were having ongoing conversations with representatives of schools and districts around the state about the need to have a paid position for a family liaison at every school, at the time of this study there was no funding to do so. Nonetheless, some 250 volunteers had gone through Champions Together's liaison training over the past few years and were hard at work in their schools across the state.

In the two-day Champions Together training, new liaisons become knowledgeable about *IDEA* and the contents of the Illinois State Board of Education's *A Parents' Guide: The Educational Rights of Students With Disabilities*,¹² and they learn how to work with parents of children with disabilities, including how to form parent support groups and teach parent courses. What, to some, may seem like a lot to cover over two

days, actually may be less intimidating to the volunteers themselves. Many of them are parents of special education students or special education teachers who are already very familiar with much of the curriculum.

Create Mutual-support Cohorts

Generally speaking, parent liaisons come from a range of backgrounds. At one end of the spectrum are those who have been stay-at-home parents and have never worked outside the home; at the other end are those who come to the liaison job with extensive training and experience in related work (e.g., social work). Once liaisons are on the job, their experiences can vary significantly, as well. To encourage mutual support and learning from each other, the Utah Family Center schedules a time for “sharing” whenever liaisons come together for training. During these sharing sessions, the liaisons have reported on what they have been doing at their schools, what has worked well, and what challenges they are facing. This session gives them an opportunity to collect ideas from others in the field, as well as to offer and receive advice from colleagues. One liaison interviewed for this study asserted that “sharing stories and networking is one of the best parts of the training.”

In its monthly training sessions for IPS liaisons, the Indiana Partnerships Center has encouraged those who have done home visits in the past to offer their advice about how to best ensure successful visits. Participants offered a variety of tips, for example, liaisons should be sure to at least taste any food offered by the families they visit because not to do so would be considered an affront in many homes. This

kind of homegrown advice tends to be well received because, over the course of multiple training sessions, liaisons come to know and trust each other.

Collaborate With Other Agencies for Training

As noted earlier, partnerships can expand a PIRC's capacity to reach its goals. This is evident in the Champions Together program. In addition to profiting from their own collaboration, ADI and ISRC have sought, from the beginning, to engage parents and educators of special education children in every aspect of planning and developing the Champions Together program, seeing them, collectively, as a third partner. Focus groups consisting of parents, school administrators, school counselors, and special education experts informed the creation of the program at every step. The course curriculum used to support and educate parents about how to help their children with special needs at home and at school was written by directors of special education programs from throughout the state.

In Indiana, the IPS liaison training was planned and carried out through a collaboration comprising representatives of the Indiana Partnerships Center; of the community-based Bridges to Success program, which has worked since 1991 to develop school-community partnerships within IPS; and of the district's Title I office. This collaboration was created after the PIRC approached the Title I director and the IPS superintendent to ask if they needed help in designing and implementing a comprehensive training for the district's new Title I parent liaisons. Although the Indiana Partnerships

Tips for Training Parent Liaisons to Effectively Link Parents and Educators

- Partner with district Title I offices to develop and facilitate liaison trainings.
- Deliver a broad curriculum that helps liaisons develop the technical, cultural, and social skills required for the position.
- Prepare liaisons to meet the specific needs of parents of children with disabilities.
- Create cohorts of liaisons to facilitate networking and mutual support among all liaisons.
- Collaborate with other organizations (e.g., community-based social service agencies) to train liaisons in additional areas of need.

Center had the capacity to provide much of the needed training, staff realized that a partnership with Bridges to Success would both strengthen the connection to the district and expand the PIRC's training capacity, allowing it to cover additional topics to which Bridges to Success brought expertise. Referring to how best to operate collaboratively, one Bridges to Success staff member says, "Early on, figure out who's got the flour and who's got the eggs—what is each group best at doing." Representatives of the three partners met many times to work out goals, agendas, and formats of the training, and they plan to continue meeting regularly.

Training Parents for Leadership

Of the five PIRCs highlighted, three—the Indiana Partnerships Center, the Family Works, and IDRA's PIRC—have implemented

specific parent leadership training institutes. They have a common goal: Empower parents to lead other parents and educators in efforts to raise student achievement.

What is a parent leader? Whether playing a supportive role in a school beautification project conceived and planned by another parent, attending a school governance meeting chaired by another parent, or tutoring in an after-school program organized by another parent, many school volunteers are following the lead of someone else. That someone else is a leader—that parent who is so adept at identifying school needs and figuring out what needs to be done and who is able to enlist, advocate for, and represent other parents on behalf of the school’s students.

Few parents are ready to become a leader without some encouragement and support, and even those who *are* can be more effective if they receive some training. In focus groups with parents who have gone through such training, the common message is that parents emerged feeling able to participate more fully in their schools, districts, state-level agencies, as well as in the individual education of their children.

Identify and Adapt a Training Model

After deciding to incorporate parent leadership training into their services, the first thing that the Indiana Partnerships Center, the Family Works, and IDRA’s PIRC did was to look for a successful model from which to develop their own program. Although leadership training is a relatively new concept in the history of formal schooling, some organizations had been running trainings long enough to have built a positive reputation for success. The Common-

wealth Institute for Parent Leadership (CIPL), which has been training over 200 Kentucky parent leaders a year since 1997, is one of those (see p. 49, “Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership”). Its “fellows” are expected to graduate from the program able to build partnerships with teachers and principals, persuade other parents to get involved in schools, implement strategies that will help all children reach higher levels of learning, and leverage outside funding to sustain their school improvement projects.

Each of the three PIRCs that have offered parent leadership training has adopted—and adapted—some aspects of the CIPL model, with all three covering essentially the same curriculum as CIPL. IDRA’s PIRC broadened the model to cover four different types of parent involvement, starting with parents as teachers of their own children, as illustrated in fig. 11, Intercultural Development Research Association: Parent Leadership Training Model, on p. 50.

At the heart of its model, and evident throughout its training, is IDRA’s recognition of parents’ invaluable contribution to their own children’s education and development, starting with parents’ efforts to help their children learn and grow at home. Trainers work with participants to analyze these efforts, to instill in parents a sense of pride that they are already major contributors to their children’s success, and to help parents overcome any feelings they may have about lacking relevant skills to help with their children’s education. Pushing into the second circle of the model (i.e., parents as resources to the school), IDRA’s PIRC trainers make every attempt to help parents understand how the skills they use in the home to teach their children and for other purposes can be applied at school.

Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership

To help parents become leaders, Kentucky's Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership (CIPL) delivers three two-day sessions over the course of several months, with participants' tuition, meals, and lodging all covered by CIPL. The training is carried out in all regions of the state, with parents participating in their home region. The main topics addressed in the sessions are parents' rights to know about and gain access to school operations and data, key elements of the state's education reform legislation and policy, where to go and whom to contact for information about educational and community resources, and specific ways to act as advocates for school reform. Staff from the Kentucky Department of Education are recruited to discuss the state's standards-based education system, and representatives from education agencies and organizations in the given region are invited to participate in a roundtable discussion about utilizing community resources to enhance student achievement. CIPL prepares parents to be leaders by providing them with information and data on school performance (e.g., student test scores, graduation rates) and developing their partnering skills.

A vital component of the training is a culminating project that program "fellows" are required to plan and implement and that utilizes skills and knowledge gained throughout the training. The parent must identify a student achievement-related priority need in a school or district, set a goal related to meeting the need, collect and analyze school data, design and implement an activity or strategy to meet the need, keep track of outcomes, and share the results with other CIPL fellows and the community at large. The project criteria stipulate that a project must focus on improving student achievement, involve other parents, and have a lasting impact on the school (not be just a one-time event). Fellows start designing their project early in the training and can take as long as two years to complete it, during which time they can draw on the support of CIPL, including a financial stipend and coaching.

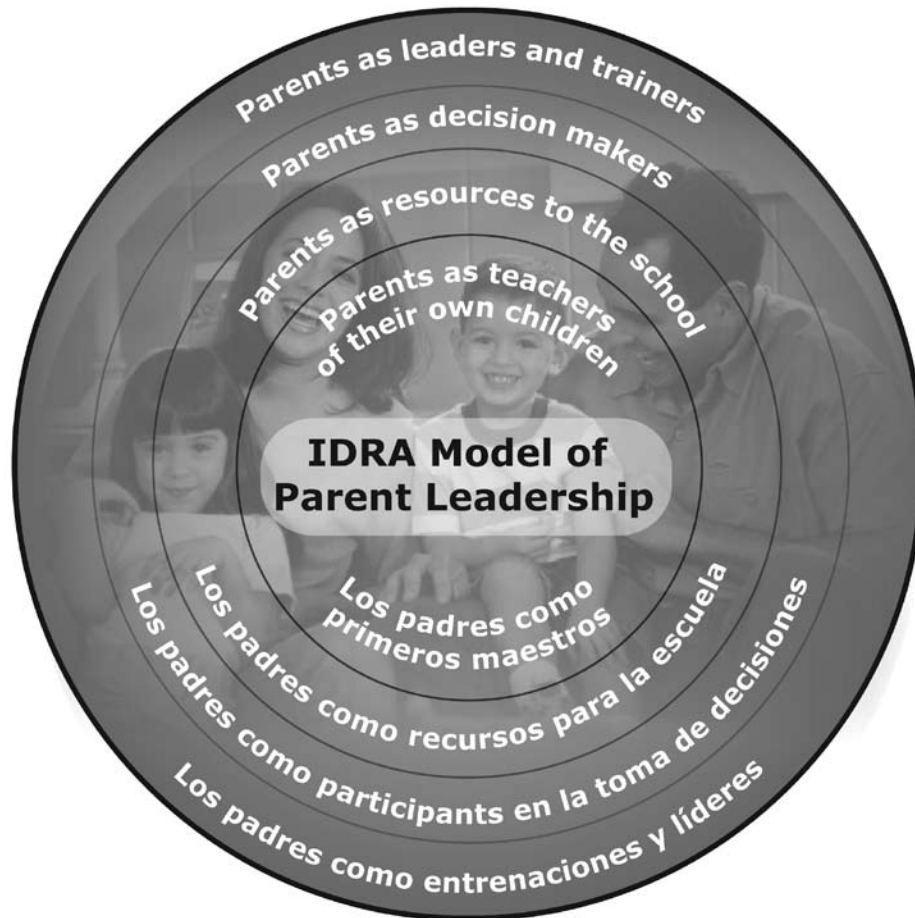
After analyzing achievement data at his son's school and seeing that science scores had declined, one fellow decided to see what he could do to help improve them. He persuaded the school council to include a science lab in renovation plans, asked for a state audit of the school's science curriculum, and sponsored a well-attended family science night. The following year, test results showed that science scores had risen 14 percentage points, a gain that the fellow attributed at least in part to the increased amount of attention focused on science, thanks to his efforts.

In addition to carrying out school-based projects, many program fellows have gone on to play major policy-making roles in schools, districts, and at the state level, as members of:

- School site councils – 650+;
- Local school boards – 34;
- State parent advisory councils – 39;
- Scholastic audit teams – 7;
- State textbook selection committees – 8; and
- School council boards of directors – 8.

Because over the years the organization received so many calls from other groups trying to design and implement leadership programs, it created the Center for Parent Leadership (CPL), which provides consulting services and training to organizations across the country that are trying to implement their own programs.

Figure 11. Intercultural Development Research Association: Parent Leadership Training Model



The goal is to help parents see the variety of ways they can participate in the classroom and elsewhere at school. Pushing into the third circle (i.e., parents as decision-makers), PIRC trainers help parents understand and further develop good decision-making skills as related to education. Finally, pushing to the outermost circle, PIRC trainers help parents develop and hone the skills needed to work in groups, support one another, and act collectively, as well as to effectively impart to other parents the knowledge they have developed throughout their own earlier training.

All three of the PIRCs (i.e., Indiana Partnerships Center, Family Works, IDRA's PIRC) that have adapted the CIPL model for their training also require that participants carry out a culminating project in their schools that gets other parents involved as well. These projects have ranged from efforts focused on getting more fathers involved in school to curriculum-oriented efforts, such as creating a children's book club and establishing a student math competition called Mathletics. All three PIRCs have the leadership trainees start their projects toward the beginning

of the training; PIRC staff members then help as needed throughout the ensuing months of training, assessing progress and needs at each training session. Recognizing that some projects require resources beyond the planners' time and creativity, the Family Works' training program has awarded participants a \$500 stipend to help fund their projects.

Although each of the training programs has offered multiple, recurring sessions over a period of months, the length of each session, their frequency, and the number of overall sessions has varied among programs, depending on the needs and desires of their constituents. For example, the Indiana Partnerships Center received feedback from participants saying they would like to cover the same material, but meet less often. So the center packed more content into each session, lengthening the time commitment for each meeting, but bringing participants together for only four overnights and three additional one-day sessions, instead of the original seven overnights.

Unlike the other two PIRCs, whose leadership training has been offered independent of any individual school or district, IDRA's PIRC offers the training only when it is requested by a host organization (e.g., a district). It also tailors the length and frequency of the sessions to the needs and desires of whichever organization is hosting the event. For the most part, its curriculum is delivered in five to eight monthly sessions of about three hours each.

IDRA's PIRC is also the only PIRC that offers bilingual leadership training, as reflected in the name of its training program, the Bilingual Parent Leadership Academy. One IDRA trainer notes that many districts have requested sepa-

rate leadership academies, one in English and one in Spanish, but IDRA has refused to make this split because, he says, "a mission of leadership training is to bring people together." The Indiana Partnerships Center recently identified a need for parent leadership training in Spanish and, at the time of this study, was planning to pilot a Latino parent leadership academy.

Recruit Participants Who Mirror Their Community

Because IDRA's PIRC responds to district or other organizations' requests for training and delivers it at their sites, the host organization (i.e., the requesting district) is responsible for recruiting participants. In contrast, the Indiana Partnerships Center has been recruiting its leadership trainees by using its own database of contacts and by reaching out to other community organizations and education agencies to ask for nominations. In choosing from among applicants it makes efforts to ensure a diverse pool of participants that mirrors their communities. Each potential Parent Leadership Institute participant submits an application that addresses the candidate's participation in the school system. The applicant also must pledge to attend all training sessions and submit one personal reference. Unlike some of the other models, the Indiana Partnerships Center also requires that any school, district, or organization nominating an applicant send candidates in teams of at least two, which could be two parents or could be a parent and an educator. Parent candidates must have a child enrolled in an Indiana K–12 public (including charter) or private school.

The Family Works also has had an extensive outreach campaign to attract leadership trainees

each year. Parents have been recruited through targeted mailing, using lists generated by the Maryland State Department of Education, Title I schools, the Maryland PTA, district family involvement offices, and other family support organizations. E-mail distribution lists and a network of program graduates serving as “ambassadors” also have been used. A Family Works staff person asserted that the PIRC has not looked to train established leaders, but, instead, has sought “traditionally not-involved or untapped parents who have capabilities.” Applicants have had to receive a sign-off from the principal of the school they represent to ensure that the parent and school were establishing a productive partnership. Selection has been made by a committee of stakeholders charged with developing a cohort that is balanced, both geographically and racially, and that spans K–12 education.

Evaluate and Innovate to Improve

Although the Family Works has not allowed educators to participate in leadership training unless they do so as parents, IDRA’s PIRC has actually targeted educators as a way of having greater impact, a goal that emerged in the natural course of the organization’s self-reflection. PIRC trainers see the staff of a district’s Title I office as a natural audience for the training. If district-level staff are trained, such as district-level parent coordinators or liaisons, who are connected to the extended education community, there is a much better chance that the model will proliferate. As one trainer puts it, “We’re trying to work ourselves out of a job here by preparing *them* to train parent leaders, not us. The train-the-trainers model is always uppermost in our minds.”

In this same vein, IDRA’s PIRC offers additional leadership training to those who want to be able to train others. WOW! Workshops on Workshops (WOW) is a two-day training that provides future trainers with the skills to run their own effective, engaging workshops; it does so, in part, by reviewing recognized principles about how adults, in particular, tend to learn and by helping participants understand how to apply these principles in the context of designing innovative activities. In the 2005–06 school year, 132 parent leaders and educators participated in WOW training, and these participants, in turn, trained more than 3,960 parents on education issues.

For its part, the Indiana Partnerships Center has responded to participant feedback by beginning to offer regionalized leadership training rather than basing all training in Indianapolis and infusing it with a statewide perspective. In the 2005–06 school year, it instituted a regional leadership academy for Monroe County, to the south of Indianapolis; and, at the time of this study, it was planning to pilot a Latino parent leadership academy in another region that has a greater concentration of Latino families than elsewhere in the state. According to a 2005 external evaluation,¹³ the regional model “was shown to be as effective in promoting [parents’] skill development, confidence in coordinating with schools, and involvement in projects”¹⁴ as the centralized model of training that has been used since the PIRC began offering parent leadership training in 2003. The evaluation report also notes that in comparison to the state model, the regionalized training was far more specific and targeted in developing school-based projects. Another benefit of the regional approach, the report notes, is its reduction of travel time and costs for trainees.

Training Parents and Educators to Function in Teams

Efforts to form and train teams of parents and educators offer the most direct route to the ultimate goal of using such partnerships to increase student achievement. Several of the highlighted PIRCs have established programs to create and train these school-based teams to focus on parent involvement and student achievement. These teams either supplement the efforts of already established school-based teams (e.g., school improvement teams, school site councils) or, if no other teams exist, become the main vehicle for partnership at a school site.

At the heart of the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) model, which Maryland's Family Works adopted as a core program to promote, is the school-based action team for partnerships, described earlier on p. 44. The team, which is intended to be an arm of a school site council or school improvement team, develops an annual action plan that reflects its family- and community-involvement goals for the year and that ties directly to the school improvement plan and the parent involvement policy. School teams are supposed to meet at least once a month.

In early 2000, the Family Works was focusing on the topics of early childhood education, parent leadership, and communication when its director realized that the parent-school partnership piece seemed a logical extension of these foci. She contacted NNPS to seek training for her staff in program implementation and in preparation to serve as NNPS trainers themselves for participating Maryland schools. Thereafter, the

Tips for Training Parents for Education Leadership

- Identify and adapt current successful models of parent leadership training to meet your needs.
- Enlist the help of community-based organizations, alumni of past training, and education agencies to recruit diverse participants that mirror the community.
- To build capacity and reach, take a train-the-trainers approach (e.g., train district staff who, in turn, train school staff).
- Evaluate and innovate a training program to meet the needs of targeted constituents regarding such matters as location, time requirements, and informational needs.

Family Works staff began offering NNPS's one-day professional development workshops at which school representatives learn how to:

- Establish an action team for partnership;
- Write an annual action plan for partnerships linked to their school improvement plan;
- Use NNPS's framework (i.e., six types of involvement, located on p. 44) to include activities that will engage all families in many different ways, all linked to school improvement goals; and
- Evaluate and then work to improve the partnership program each year.¹⁵

To entice schools and districts to join the partnership, the Family Works began to cover their initial fees for joining NNPS, provide training sessions for interested district staff, pay for two substitute teachers per school for teachers on the action team to attend training, and convene periodic meetings with district NNPS members

across the state to share ideas and sustain progress. The Utah Family Center, while not quite so far along in its implementation, has begun working with some schools across the state to promote the NNPS model, and it also infuses the NNPS philosophy into many of its own materials and trainings.

Pursuing goals similar to those of NNPS, ADI developed its Solid Foundation program to generate and support more effective parent involvement, particularly in communities with high poverty and children living in risky environments. ADI considers the Solid Foundation less as a program and more as a “blueprint,” a highly flexible model for building school communities with components that can be tailored to support the unique needs and goals of any school or district while respecting the context of the lives of the parents, students, and educators who live there. As with the NNPS model, a major piece of the Solid Foundation model is the creation of a school community council that will guide school efforts to involve parents in meaningful ways in everything from helping their children at home to decision-making at the school policy level. The council also makes recommendations for strengthening the school improvement plan’s emphasis on school-family connections. Additionally, for schools that do not already have a school-parent compact in place, the council develops one, detailing some of the basic responsibilities of parents, teachers, and students for achieving the school community’s learning goals.

Once a school decides to implement the Solid Foundation model, ADI’s PIRC staff work with the principal to identify 1) a teacher or other education professional at the school to serve as

Tips for Training Parents and Educators to Team Up for School Achievement

- Look for existing programs that facilitate partnerships and enlist program representatives’ help or adapt their measures.
- Make sure teams are developing policy and practice that supplement and integrate with existing school policy and practice.
- Train other trainers to help ensure that team efforts are sustainable.
- Use those closest to the community to identify potential team members.

a facilitator for parent education activities and 2) a group of parent leaders to coordinate parent-involvement efforts in the school. This group forms the nucleus of the school community council, and these members will recommend and recruit other parents, educators, and community members to fill key roles and positions and carry out essential community-building activities as specified in Solid Foundation’s materials. These activities include, for example, providing school-home communication tools for teachers and holding workshops for teachers and parents on how to work together to support student success.

Solid Foundation staff work with individual schools for two years. Their goal is to train and support school leaders well enough so the school community council will be able to sustain itself and grow on its own once Solid Foundation staff move to the next school.



Conclusion

Ensuring success for all students is a monumentally important task that requires the cooperation of those with the greatest influence in children's lives—parents and teachers. Taken as a whole, the strategies presented in this guide are aimed at generating that cooperation on behalf of higher student achievement.

Given their differing constituents, locations, resources, and staff expertise, the highlighted PIRCs operate in different manners. Not all of them use all of the same strategies. Nor do they all implement the same strategies in the same way. Nonetheless, there are enough general patterns and similarities to validate the promising nature of these approaches and to underscore the importance of the following suggestions, in particular:

- Assess the needs of your constituents. This means understanding the range of communication and training needs of parents in the schools and districts being served, as well as understanding how different education agencies need to evolve if they are effectively to include parents as partners.

- Be creative in efforts to engage all parents, including those who are considered hard-to-reach because, for example, they live in remote areas, do not speak English, are homeless, or have developed a mistrust of schools due to their own education experience.
- Prepare parents and educators alike for partnership by ensuring that both parties are familiar with *NCLB* parent involvement requirements, understand why these requirements are important, and are adequately trained to work together.
- Build greater organizational capacity and avoid duplicative or conflicting efforts by promoting networks and other cross-collaboration efforts among multiple organizations that have similar goals, including parent involvement organizations, education agencies, and a range of community-based organizations.

Through these efforts, PIRCs and other parent involvement organizations can seed and nurture strong parent-educator partnerships, helping to ensure that parents and educators alike understand parents' essential role in their children's education and are prepared to work together to achieve greater student success.



APPENDIX A

Research Methodology

The research approach for this guide is a combination of case study methodology and benchmarking of “best practices.” Used in businesses worldwide as they seek to continuously improve their operations, benchmarking has more recently been applied to education. Benchmarking is a structured, efficient process that targets key operations and identifies promising practices in relationship to traditional practice, previous practice at the selected sites (lessons learned), and local outcome data. The methodology is further explained in a background document,¹⁶ which lays out the justification for identifying promising practices based on four sources of rigor in the approach:

- theory and research base;
- expert review;
- site evidence of effectiveness; and
- systematic field research and cross-site analysis.

The steps of the research process were: defining a study scope, seeking input from experts to refine the scope and inform site selection criteria, screening potential sites, selecting sites to study, conducting site visits, collecting and analyzing data to write case reports, and writing a user-friendly guide.

Site Selection Process

The first step in site selection was to compile a list of candidate organizations into a matrix. The initial list of 43 sites included a mix of Parental Information and Resource Centers (PIRCs), other intermediary organizations, and SEAs and LEAs. This list was compiled through research findings and recommendations from members of an advisory panel, other experts in the field, staff from the U.S. Department of Education, and education agencies implementing parental involvement programs. A variety of organizations, locations, and distribution models were identified.

The parental involvement model that was developed to frame the guide was used to create a screening matrix for site selection. For the organizations identified as potential candidates, their strong parent involvement practices were mapped against the various elements of the model. Supplementary questions based on the specific relevant subcategory were asked of each organization and ratings based on their responses were entered in the screening matrix. (See the next section for more detail on criteria.)

Site selection was based on the total score in the screening matrix and also on geographic considerations. The set of sites was chosen to

include different states, target audiences, and distribution models. In addition, a “cluster” approach was used, with priority given to candidates that worked successfully with other intermediary organizations and education agencies so that a more complete partnership story and a broader range of practices could be gathered during a single site visit. These partner organizations and agencies also had to stand up as exemplary organizations that could be featured in the guide as well.

Screening Criteria

The rubric used to select the sites included two organizational factors: mission and stable structure. In addition, it included four practice dimensions: number of subcategories from the parent involvement model that the organization addressed; populations targeted; partnerships with education agencies; and evidence of growth over time. These four practice dimensions are summarized below.

Subcategories of Parent Involvement Model Addressed

The parent involvement model that was developed through consultation with experts and practitioners in the field includes a range of strategies to inform parents and educators on their rights and responsibilities regarding parent involvement, to train parents to become leaders and work in partnership with educators, and to support parents and educators in partnership at the decision-making level. Organizations were scored on the number of strategies that they implemented on the various levels of the model.

Populations Targeted

Those organizations that reached as broad a spectrum of parents as possible in their communities were scored higher on the rubric. For example, although it is a mandate that all PIRCs target at least 50 percent of their services to low-income families, many of the PIRCs went above and beyond this mandate to try to engage hard-to-reach populations, such as low-income Native American families on reservations and migrant families.

Partnerships with Education Agencies Criterion

Organizations were asked if and how they partnered with education agencies to improve schools and raise student achievement. Those candidates that had successful, sustained, and varied partnerships established with agencies were scored highly on the rubric.

Evidence of Growth Criterion

Researchers looked for evidence that organizations had attempted a range of strategies to support schools and raise student achievement and that, over the years, these strategies had developed or been replaced with more effective ones. Type and frequency of reflection was gauged, as well as the documentation of changes that led to more efficient and effective practice.

Study Framework and Data Collection

A conceptual framework (i.e., the parent involvement model in fig.2 on page 10) was developed to guide the study of the selected sites. While each organization included in the guide

practices a range of strategies to support parent involvement, each case study needed to focus on those practices supporting the end goal of helping parents and educators work as partners to improve student achievement. The framework used in this study was developed based on the research literature on parent leadership and the benefits of parent involvement. The major categories in the framework include strategies for communicating the rights and responsibilities of parents and educators regarding parent involvement, for training parents and educators to work in partnership, and for supporting these partnerships at the decision-making level. Input from researchers on the project's advisory panel and from practitioners in the field informed the development of this model.

A two-day site visit was conducted at each PIRC to gather the information for this guide. Each visit included informal observations throughout the organization, attendance at events, school visits, and interviews. The primary source of data were interviews with a variety of role groups, including parents, staff members, administrators, and members of partner organizations. An interview protocol was developed based on the study framework and was adapted to each role group. That is, separate but overlapping sets of questions were developed for parents, administrators, staff, and others. Most interviews were tape-recorded, with key interviews later transcribed for more detailed analysis.

Documents from each organization served as an additional source of information. Collected during the site visit, these artifacts included such items as training manuals, *NCLB* guides, letters to parents, newsletters, training materials, brochures, and surveys.

Analysis and Reporting

A case report was written about each site and reviewed by site directors for accuracy. From these case reports, artifacts, and transcripts of interviews, the project team analyzed similarities and differences in strategy implementation across the sites. This cross-site analysis, along with site detail, contributed to the final guide.

This descriptive research process suggests promising practices—ways to do things that other parent involvement practitioners have found helpful, lessons they have learned—and practical “how-to” guidance. This is not the kind of experimental research that can yield valid causal claims about what works. Readers should judge for themselves the merits of these practices, based on their understanding of why they should work, how they fit the local context, and what happens when they actually try them. Also, readers should understand that these descriptions do not constitute an endorsement of specific practices or products.

Using the Guide

Ultimately, readers of this guide will need to select, adapt, and implement practices that meet their individual needs and contexts. Organizations supporting and promoting parent involvement may continue the study, using the ideas and practices from these sites as a springboard for their own action research. In this way, a collection of promising practices will grow, and organizations and agencies promoting parent involvement can support each other in implementation and learning.



APPENDIX B

Resources

[BuildingChoice.org](http://www.buildingchoice.org)

BuildingChoice.org, a Web site funded by the U.S. Department of Education, provides tools and resources for educators who are working to expand choice options for families. The Web site includes many examples of how districts across the country are communicating choice options to parents and working to involve parents in their schools, along with sample materials from these districts and tools that have been developed to help facilitate parent involvement.

<http://www.buildingchoice.org>

[Harvard Family Research Project](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/index.html)

Housed in the Harvard Graduate School of Education, the Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) assists policymakers, practitioners, and philanthropic organizations in developing strategies to support more effective educational programs, practices, and policies for all children, especially those who are disadvantaged due to poverty and other challenging circumstances. In addition to featuring relevant research and information that the project has collected, analyzed, and synthesized, the organization's Web site also includes a link for joining the Family Involvement Network of Educators (FINE), its national network of over 5,000 people who are interested in promoting partnerships between children's families, educators, and their communities.

<http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/index.html>

[KSA-Plus Communications](http://www.ksaplus.com)

The KSA-Plus Communications Web site offers training opportunities and a range of other services to help parents gain the skills, knowledge, and confidence to become advocates for better schools for their children. KSA also runs workshops and provides consulting services, and provides materials to help administrators and teachers better understand how they can tap into the underutilized resources that parents and families offer and can better meet the increasingly diverse needs of families.

<http://www.ksaplus.com>

[National Network of Partnership Schools](http://www.partnershipschools.org)

The National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS), at Johns Hopkins University, is an organization that helps to build parent involvement, family engagement, and community partnerships for elementary, middle, and high schools across the country by providing tools, guidelines, and a model for developing a school-based action team. Among the many resources offered on the Web site are information on how to join NNPS, research publications and products that support implementation of the NNPS model, training opportunities for school-, district-, and state-level participants, and myriad success stories from those who have used the model.

<http://www.partnershipschools.org>

The Parent Teacher Association

The Parent Teacher Association (PTA) is a national organization with state and local offices around the country. Its national Web site offers a range of resources, including parent resources, relevant current event articles and stories, and information about training opportunities. It also provides a tool to help visitors find their local PTA. PTAs provide a forum at which parents, administrators, teachers, and other concerned adults discuss how to promote quality education and how to encourage community involvement in order to create a healthy environment and safe neighborhoods for all children.

<http://www.pta.org>

Parents for Public Schools

Parents for Public Schools is a national organization with community-based chapters working in public schools to improve education. The Web site offers links to all of the local chapters, which offer a range of services, such as trainings, outreach events, and information on school enrollment. The Web sites for both the national organization and local chapters also include links to a range of other organizations that provide resources for advocacy, training, and many other types of assistance.

<http://www.parents4publicschools.com>

The Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence

The Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence is a nonprofit education advocacy organization serving the state of Kentucky. Among its key initiatives is the Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership, which trains Kentuckians to become advocates in their children's education. In response to requests for assistance from outside of Kentucky, in 2001, the Prichard Committee also initiated the Center for Parent Leadership to offer similar parent support and training in other states. The Prichard Committee and its multiple initiatives offer training, consulting services, and publications to support parents as education advocates.

<http://www.prichardcommittee.org>

The Right Question Project

The Right Question Project offers ideas and services intended to equip low- and moderate-income families and their communities with the skills to participate at all levels of democracy. The organization's Web site provides materials and publications, information on training sessions and consulting services, and stories of how other organizations and participants have used the organization's services.

<http://www.rightquestion.org>

The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory

The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) is a nonprofit education research, development, and dissemination corporation that works with professionals in schools, districts, states, and service agencies to improve education for all students. Its Web site provides a PDF version of *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement* (2002), a synthesis of 51 studies about the impact of family and community involvement on student achievement and effective strategies to connect schools, families, and community. SEDL, in collaboration with the Harvard Family Research Project, is now providing technical assistance to the PIRCs through a 2006 award from the U.S. Department of Education.

<http://www.sedl.org/welcome.html>

U.S. Department of Education Parental Information and Resource Centers

The U.S. Department of Education's Web site provides a Parental Information and Resources Center section that includes a description of the program and links to additional information, including lists of current and former awardees and information on the grant process.

<http://www.ed.gov/programs/pirc/index.html>

In addition, the home page of the Department Web site includes on its main navigation bar a parent link that serves as a portal to a section created exclusively for parents. Here parents and guardians can find information about how *NCLB* affects them and their children, how to help their children succeed in school, how to help their children learn to read, and other education issues.

<http://www.ed.gov>



Notes

¹ Henderson, A. and Mapp, K. 2002. *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Parent and Community Connections on Student Achievement*, p. 7. Austin, Tex.: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

² Ibid., p. 7.

³ *Parental Involvement: Title I, Part A, Non-Regulatory Guidance*, April 23, 2004, p. 3.

⁴ Available at <http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/programs/familylit/mpac>. Last accessed on June 8, 2007.

⁵ The funds are intended to target three overarching categories of parent involvement: advocacy and decision-making (including school improvement planning and creation of a required parent involvement plan); communicating information and exercising options (including providing a school report card, informing parents about school improvement and choice options, and assisting parents in exercising their options); and partnering with schools to improve student achievement (e.g., creating a school-parent compact).

⁶ When a school has been identified as being in need of improvement, its district must offer students at the school an opportunity to choose and transfer to another school in the district that is not in need of improvement.

⁷ If a school remains in need of improvement for a second year, it must offer students from low-income families access to federally approved “supplemental educational services,” including tutoring and other academic supports, that will be paid for by the local district.

⁸ McDermott, P., and Rothenberg, J. 2000, October. Why urban parents resist involvement in their

children’s elementary education. *The Qualitative Report*, 5(3 & 4).

⁹ Academic Development Institute. 2004. *A Parent Guide to No Child Left Behind*. Lincoln, Ill.: Author.

¹⁰ The Indiana Center for Family, School and Community Partnerships. (n.d.) *A Parent’s Guide to Understanding NCLB & P.L. 221*. Indianapolis: Author. Available at <http://www.fscp.org/index.asp?p=9>. (Click on link for *No Child Left Behind* and choose *A Parent’s Guide* pdf.) Last accessed on June 9, 2007.

¹¹ Epstein, J. L., Sanders, M. G., Simon, B. S., Salinas, K. C., Rodriguez Jansorn, N. R., and Van Voorhis, F. L. 2002. *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action (2nd ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

¹² Illinois State Board of Education. 2001. *A Parent’s Guide: The Educational Rights of Students with Disabilities*. Springfield, Ill.: Author. Available at http://www.cusd220.org/special/docs/parent_guide_english%5B1%5D.pdf. Last accessed on June 8, 2007.

¹³ Cassidy, J. C. 2005. *Evaluation of the Indiana Center for Family, School, and Community Partnerships’ Parent Information Resource Center Programs*. Ball State University. Unpublished evaluation.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁵ Epstein et al., op. cit.

¹⁶ Filby, N. 2006. *Approach to Methodological Rigor in the Innovation Guides*. Working paper. San Francisco: WestEd.



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