

Guide to Becoming an Effective Parent Liaison



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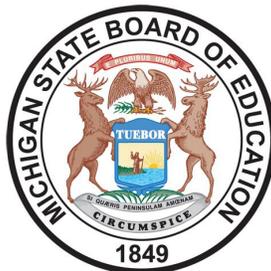
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About the Guide

The **Guide to Becoming an Effective Parent Liaison** has been designed as a resource for schools and districts who have been awarded a School Improvement Grant (SIG). One ongoing requirement of the grant has been to provide key positions such as a SIG Coordinator, Data Coach, Parent Liaison, and Mental Health Specialist. In recent years of the grant, the Mental Health Specialist has become an option as long as the social-emotional needs of students are being met. Our experiences with the School Improvement Grant since 2010, however, have demonstrated a need to develop resources and guidance on these required roles.

This guide focuses on key questions that often arise for both the Parent Liaison as well as the school and district. Each topic of the guide provides clear explanations, *examples, and site resources. Action Planning Templates found throughout the guide are designed for your immediate use and/or manipulation to fit your context.

Other components of the guide are reflections, and tips and scenarios on perceptions about your students, their families, and their home environments. One entire section addresses issues of misconceptions. This section is designed to generate reflection around how your students, their behaviors, and their family dynamics are often judged and labeled. Use these various tools, scenarios, and tips on misconceptions to help frame how you will be a true ambassador for your students and their families.

Finally, the guide is designed in workbook format to be a functional tool for your Parent Liaison. Review and use the information provided to facilitate discussions, share ideas, and to reflect on how to become an effective Parent Liaison at your school!

***Note:** Organizations that are cited in this guide are listed as resources and examples and are not endorsed by the Michigan Department of Education.

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What is a Parent Liaison?

The definition of the word “liaise” is “*to make it possible for two organizations or groups to work together and provide information to each.*” Much like the title suggests, a Parent Liaison is the designated individual based at a school whose primary function is to connect the home and school in a positive, respectful, and welcoming manner. Parent Liaisons play a dual role of ambassadorship. She represents the school through thoughtful, meaningful,

and culturally appropriate communications. He represents the parent and/or guardians by understanding the many challenges that occur in your community. The Parent Liaison can be an effective connection between home and school when both positive and challenging information needs to be shared.

Who should be a Parent Liaison?

No certifications are required to become a Parent Liaison. Schools should work closely with their district's human resource designee to create a job description that captures the qualities of a Parent Liaison that align to the school's needs.

The first step in determining what qualifications are important is to examine your school's climate and culture, demographics, and socio-cultural systems.

Consider the following when developing the position, interviewing, and selecting your Parent Liaison:

- Is a member of the community
- Enjoys or has previous experience in public speaking or public communications
- Is articulate and an effective communicator
- Is skilled in writing and developing publications
- Has ability to plan, organize and implement activities and events
- Is receptive to learning and working within the guidelines of the SIG
- Reflects the school's demographics, i.e., bilingual or multilingual
- Demonstrates tolerance of culturally and linguistically diverse populations
- Possesses empathy and understanding of the families in the community
- Serves as an ambassador and cultural broker

How do I fit?

Starting a new position always brings about many questions. We often ask ourselves “what is expected of me,” “who should I report to,” and “how do I fit in”? This section will help you answer those initial wonderings and questions. It will help you to understand how your work will support turnaround efforts and promote transformation at the school.

Working with Site Administrators

Review the initial job description and your contract to determine who will be your direct report. Most commonly, Parent Liaisons report to the SIG Coordinator; however, there is no steadfast rule on who is your site report. Site administrators are responsible, to some degree, for every adult and student on their campus. Working with your site administrator(s) will be crucial to your success. Following these best practices will assist you in determining what is expected of you:

- Meet with your site administrator(s) as soon as possible.
- Gather information on what their expectations are for you.
- Obtain staff lists, room assignments, and school maps with their permission.
- Find out and adhere to any protocols in regards to working and communicating with students and parents.
- Become familiar with FERPA guidelines (see Parent Center section Alignment to School Policy). Ask your administrator to review all policies on privacy and confidentiality.
- Schedule regular meetings to share your goals and accomplishments. Scheduling meetings twice a month would be a good start.
- And most importantly, discuss what your role is **NOT!**

Working with the SIG Coordinator

The role of the SIG Coordinator is to manage the grant. Often times, schools determine that the SIG Coordinator is your direct report. Whatever the case, your connection, communication, and interaction with your SIG Coordinator is crucial to turnaround efforts and parent involvement. Following these best practices will guide your work with the SIG Coordinator:

- Meet with your SIG Coordinator as soon as possible.
- Gather information on what the expectations are for you.
- Schedule regular meetings to share your goals and accomplishments. Start with weekly meetings.
- Review the SIG Budget Development Toolkit to become familiar with allowable expenditures.
- Discuss procedures and protocols for requesting and submitting SIG-funded expenditures.

Working with the Leadership Team

One expectation of the grant and reform efforts is that the Parent Liaison is a member of a leadership team. Leadership teams are viewed and utilized as an advisory council to school leaders, providing various perspectives on teaching, learning and assessment (i.e., school improvement team, SIG leadership team, data team). Student success and achievement is not only predicated on effective instruction, it is also supported through positive and meaningful parent involvement. The Parent Liaison is key to bringing this perspective to the team. Review the section on **Knowing the School's Strategic Plan** to better understand the importance of your role in developing parent involvement.

Working with Teachers and Staff

Getting to know and working closely with instructional staff at your campus is as important as knowing the students and their parents. It may be challenging for teachers to find time to get to know you because they are usually immersed in delivering instruction and administering assessments. Be respectful and cognizant of their time. See the next sections on **Building Rapport** and **Working with Teachers and Staff**. Once you have met the teachers at your school, maintaining a consistent and professional connection with each of them will be central to your role as an effective Parent Liaison.

Working with Parents and Families

While getting to know your teachers is important, getting to know the parents, families, and community is imperative! Once you develop and implement ways to get parents involved at the school, your role in working with parents will be an on-going process of building trust and providing resources. Your work will include assisting parents and families in understanding school dynamics and creating a space in which they feel welcome and become involved in their child's education.

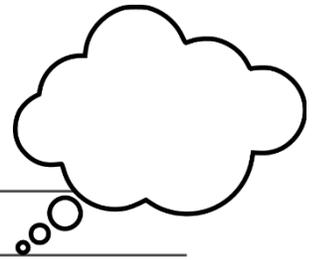
Working with Other Community Stakeholders

Working with your community and various stakeholders in the community will also be a part of your responsibility as a Parent Liaison. Most communities have the basic supports such as Parks and Recreation, YMCA, Boys & Girls Club, Boy and Girl Scouts of America, 4-H, public libraries, civic organizations, churches, local museums, bookstores, and other philanthropic organizations and businesses that support educational initiatives. By getting to know these stakeholders, you may be able to use their assistance in connecting students and families with outside agencies.

Working with External Service Providers

One aspect of the School Improvement Grant allows schools to contract services with External Services Providers (ESPs). Often times, these vendors or ESPs have before/after school and parent components. Work closely with your SIG Coordinator to determine if these services have been contracted. Discussing your role and responsibilities in working with ESPs and how their work aligns with other parent engagement activities and events that you will be planning and implementing throughout the school year will help you avoid duplication of services as well as enhancing services that may be already offered.

My Reflections



1. What are the key messages for me from this section?

2. What are my next steps?

3. What further support/learning will I need?

Creating a Safe Space

As you review this guide, keep in mind that your ultimate goal as an effective Parent Liaison is to create a welcoming environment where parents and community can interact and become involved with the school and their child's learning, all of which leads to student success. The Parent Liaison will establish space where parents feel comfortable. Research shows that parent involvement will increase the chance of a child's success. No formula exists for creating a safe space at your school or in your community. Your success hinges on your ability to understand and respect your context! The ability to recognize and articulate your context will be key in this process.

What is Context?

Your context is your reality! Your context is a description of how life happens for you in a particular place and time. Traditional parent engagement activities (i.e., parent-teacher conferences, open houses, parent night) do not always fit the context of your families. For example, we find that many students go home to single parents, grandparents, and/or parents who work multiple jobs and non-traditional hours. Understanding this context will help you plan activities and set appropriate expectations.

Defining Your Context:

Where to Begin?

Knowing the School's Strategic Plan

The strategic plan of the school is the document that guides how teaching and learning, culture and climate, assessment, and student needs are addressed. The School Improvement Grant application will most likely serve as that document. Even though both Focus and Priority schools are eligible to apply for the SIG, to date, only Priority schools here in Michigan have been awarded. Since Priority schools are required to submit a Reform/Redesign (R/R) plan once identified, they have already selected and begun implementing the intervention model. The SIG application process allows for the schools to continue with their current model or to select a new model. Regardless of the choice, all models have some component of parent and community involvement that must be addressed.

The Unpacking Tool

The Unpacking Tool is designed to “unpack” or to put the plan into “actionable steps.” This tool directly aligns with the components of the selected intervention plan. The Unpacking Tool is not another compliance document. On the contrary, it is a tool that should be developed and utilized by all members of the staff. The protocol of the Unpacking Tool is facilitated by using “collaborative conversations.” These conversations are typically initiated by the leadership team. For this reason, it is imperative that all of the components discussed have representation, i.e. Parent Liaison representing Parent and Community Engagement.

The next section identifies each of the intervention models and describes how parent and community engagement factor into the overall plan.

Intervention Models and Parent Engagement

Working with your SIG Coordinator, determine which model was selected by your school and review the plan in detail. Taking time to become familiar with the components of your school's model that specifically address parent and community engagement will be critical to understanding the requirements and information that relates directly to you and your role. An outline of requirements of the four models is provided below:

Transformation Model:

Provide ongoing mechanisms for engagement of families and community:

- Plans should clearly describe both the engagement strategies and how they are connected to the school's reform which are likely reflected in the big ideas or instructional program.
- The school has outlined multiple strategies to engage families in the reform efforts

Turnaround Model:

Provide appropriate social, emotional, and community services that support students:

- The plan for providing student support includes a mechanism for identifying student social and emotional needs, specifies supports that will be provided at the school, and specifies supports that will be provided through community agencies.

Early Intervention Model:

On-site or accessible comprehensive services for children and community partnerships that promote families' access to services that support their children's learning and development.

Whole School Reform Model:

A "whole-school reform model" is further defined as a model that:

- Is designed to improve student academic achievement or attainment;
- Is implemented for all students in a school; and
- Addresses, at a minimum and in a comprehensive and coordinated manner, each of the following:
 - School leadership
 - Teaching and learning in at least one full academic content area (including professional learning for educators)
 - Student non-academic support.
 - Family and community engagement

Now that you are familiar with the basic requirements concerning parent and community of each intervention model, review your site plan and use the Action Planning Template provided here to become well-informed and to begin to frame an action plan for the work you will be doing!

My Reflections



1. What are the key messages for me from this section?

2. What are my next steps?

3. What further support/learning will I need?

Action Planning Template for Knowing the School's Strategic Plan

Select the Intervention Model your School is Implementing

Transformation

Turnaround

Early Learning

Whole School Reform

Key Questions

Have you reviewed the entire intervention model?

Yes

No

Are you familiar with the Parent/Community Engagement section of the model?

Yes

No

Are you a member of the school leadership team?

Yes

No

Summarize the Parent Involvement Section in your own Words:

Points of Clarification: Use this section to list any component of the plan that needs clarification.

Summarize what your next steps are:

What's Next?

Building Rapport

One challenging task for the Parent Liaison is getting to know all of the stakeholders in the building. Building a rapport with teachers and staff is first on the list. To be effective in your position, making and maintaining a direct connection with teachers and staff will be crucial. Whether you are new to the building today or have been on staff for a while, here are 10 helpful hints to get you started:



Send a Personalized Letter or Email

Personalized Letter: Using your school letterhead, develop a personalized letter of introduction to each staff member. Begin with sharing your personal connection to the job, school, and students. Next, briefly describe your duties and expectations. Finish with welcoming them into your center or office and explaining how you can be supportive of their efforts. Personally sign the letter in black or blue ink. Real signatures add a sense of taking time to care!

Emails: Set up your email profile to show your photo. Send an email with the same content as described above. In options, select a "read receipt." This will enable you to view who has opened and read your emails. Follow up with unopened/unread emails with a personal visit.

Visit Teachers at their Classrooms

Face-to-face visits are very effective. People are able to put a name and face together and have the opportunity to experience your personality and nuances. When planning a classroom visit, follow these recommended guidelines:

- ✓ Obtain a staff list and a room assignment list.
- ✓ Access and print a copy of the daily schedules.
- ✓ Never interrupt instruction.
- ✓ Plan a visit during planning periods or any transition time, or when teachers are monitoring and not instructing.
- ✓ Use your staff list to check off whom you met and who remains.
- ✓ Remember whom you meet and greet them accordingly when you see them again throughout the day.

***Note:** Be aware of your school's culture when addressing adults. Learn quickly how individuals like to be addressed, i.e. first name (Barbara), last name (Mr. Denton), and/or special title (Principal Caldwell or Dr. Davis).

Be Introduced at Staff Meet

Working closely with your administrator, secure a time at an initial staff meeting when you can be introduced. Prepare a short presentation for the staff. Always share your passion, your function at the school, and availability. Your presentation could include some of the following information:

- ✓ Tentative dates for student/parent/community events
- ✓ Office location and hours
- ✓ Parent Center location and hours (see section on Parent Center)
- ✓ A list of resources and/or supports you will be providing

Allow for questions and answers at the end!

Conduct a Professional Learning Workshop

Working closely with your administrator or SIG Coordinator, develop, design, and deliver a professional learning workshop. Focus in on how teachers and staff can use your expertise and the parent center to better connect with students and parents on a different yet positive level. Keeping workshops to a minimum of thirty (30) minutes and a maximum of ninety (90) minutes may work best. Provide teachers with resources that can be used immediately. To be highly effective, have copies and direct access to resources and materials. When teachers have to print off or gather materials, they often prioritize their busy days and put off what is not readily available. A good presenter minimizes obstacles for his/her participants.

Create a Facebook Page

Using any social media (Instagram, Twitter, Google), create a home page and invite teachers and staff to join. Maintaining social media pages and/or entries can be time consuming. Realize your level of commitment to using this means of communication before you begin this project. Once you have invited staff to join, use your staff list to see who has not joined. Follow up with a face-to-face to meet and greet and to understand possible reasons for not joining your page. Be open and understanding to individuals who may not use social media and offer to assist when possible! Remember to follow the proper procedures for the school and district when setting up social media communications.

Host an Open House

One of the best ways to attract staff to your parent center is to host an Open House. Invite staff to join you to meet and greet over refreshments. Plan a short presentation and/or tour. Explain why your center has been created and how it will be utilized by parents and community in an effort to support school transformation. As always, don't forget your sign-in sheet. Use the sign-in sheet to identify who did not attend. Follow up with a face-to-face to meet and greet and to understand possible reasons for not attending your Open House. Be open and understanding to individuals who may have

had prior or conflicting commitments or whose schedules did not permit them to attend. Take this into consideration when planning future similar events.

Host a Coffee Mixer

In your office, at your center, or in the staff lounge, host a coffee mixer before school and/or during lunch. Again, have your staff list ready to check off whom you have met and who is missing. Follow up with a face-to-face to meet and greet!

Create a Bulletin Board

Working closely with your administrator and/or SIG Coordinator, request that a bulletin board be assigned to you that is strategically placed in the building (in the staff lounge, the copy room, or the mailroom). For the first month of school, create a bulletin board that has your name, title, location, picture, and contact information. Consider making the bulletin board functional. For example, have a pocket with your business cards, brochures, or literature about your role and responsibilities. You could also include resources and information on the parent center. Consider posting a calendar of events and always leave a message to invite everyone to visit or contact you!

Create a Multi-Media Introduction

Using technology can improve communication and exposure. By creating a multi-media production, such as YouTube, Vimeo, or an iMovie, staff and teachers will be able to put a name with a face and better understand your function and role at the school. Invite parents to be a part of the production. Use students as well but be sure that proper permissions are secured. Your media could be shared in the following ways:

- ✓ Playing at a staff meeting.
- ✓ Playing before a professional learning activity.
- ✓ Playing on a continuous loop on the school's TV.
- ✓ Sending a link or copy via email.
- ✓ Posting on the social media page.

Send Personal Invitation to Meet and Post your Office Hours

Another way to meet your staff is to simply send a personal invitation to meet in your office. Office appointments probably should not last longer than fifteen (15) minutes, and it's a good idea to spend a few minutes introducing yourself and sharing your personal experiences with working with parents and students. The bulk of your time can address questions and comments from your invited guest. Using your listening skills to understand teachers' perspectives in respect to their students and parents will help you become better at both being a resource and providing resources!

Action Planning Template for Building Rapport

This planning sheet will help you put your plan into action. Making a good first and/or lasting impression with teachers and staff will sustain the perception that your position is important!

Describe your Method of Introduction:

Date(s): _____ Time(s): _____

Location(s): _____

Planning Checklist:

- Meeting with Site Administrator
- Meeting with SIG Coordinator

Checklist of Materials:

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Staff List | <input type="checkbox"/> PowerPoint Presentation | <input type="checkbox"/> Post Cards |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Room Assignments | <input type="checkbox"/> LCD Projector | <input type="checkbox"/> Brochures |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sign-in Sheets | <input type="checkbox"/> Laptop or Computer | <input type="checkbox"/> Information Literature |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Letterhead Stationary | <input type="checkbox"/> Video Camera | <input type="checkbox"/> Coffee/Refreshments |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Self-Photo | <input type="checkbox"/> Blank DVDs | <input type="checkbox"/> Craft Materials |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Daily Schedules | <input type="checkbox"/> Social Media Account | <input type="checkbox"/> Butcher Paper |

Other:

Working Closely with Teachers and Staff

In the previous section, we discussed ways of introducing yourself and getting to know your teachers and staff. Establishing a positive working relationship will be a key to bridging home and school. Knowing what teachers and staff expect of students and parents can be crucial to creating a healthy home-school connection. This section of the guide focuses on what will be helpful for you to know to work closely with teachers and staff as an effective Parent Liaison. Here are four basic principles to explore: (a) Behavioral Expectations, (b) School Preparedness, (c) Homework Policies, and (d) Parental Expectations.

Behavioral Expectations

As adults, we are all proficient in understanding context and maneuvering within our surroundings by adjusting our speech patterns, facial expressions, and other physical behaviors accordingly. We also know that there are rules and laws that govern our verbal and physical aggressions. For children and teens, this knowledge and understanding does not always come automatically; it must be taught. And even when it is in place, it is often applied incorrectly.

Behavioral expectations around the use of social media and devices have become one of the leading topics of discussion. It will be necessary for you to review school policies for using computers, tablets, and cell phones on campus. Often, teachers have their own classroom rules regarding the use of these devices. Therefore, clarity on both school policy and classroom expectations is necessary. By working closely with your staff and teachers about these devices, you will be able to better inform parents of these expectations.

Think about the various contexts or environments in which students encounter and interact throughout any given day of the week. Using your own childhood experiences, write down what the behavioral expectations were in each situation. For example, while watching TV at home, was there an expectation of posture, where your hands or feet could rest, how long you would pay attention, and if you could talk and interact with others during this time? Reflecting on your responses will help you bridge what students and

parents must understand about the school setting and how home and school expectations may or may not align:

At Home	At School
watching TV on the weekend	watching an instructional video
at the dinner table	in the school lunch cafeteria
playing with neighborhood friends	interacting on the school playground or hanging out in the gym
going outside, to the mall, to the store, etc...	transition from one class to another or one subject to another
receiving instruction from a parent (take out the garbage and clean your room)	receiving instruction from a teacher (causes of the Civil War)

What did you notice about your responses? Did you determine that a different set of rules and expectations existed for the same activity when they occurred in different contexts? As a Parent Liaison, you can help parents and students discover this misalignment as well as supporting parents by assisting teachers and staff in clearly communicating the school-level and individual classroom expectations.

School Preparedness

To support student success and academic achievement, students must also be prepared for school and ready to learn. By having a discussion with teachers, you will be able to gather the expectations for preparedness to share and discuss with your parents. You will find that school preparedness goes beyond bringing supplies such as pencils, pens, and paper. You will discover that parents may be unaware of how students are not performing in class due to a lack of rest or other possible hardships.

An effective Parent Liaison will become aware of the various scenarios and reasons that students come to school unprepared and will find ways of providing parents with the resources, tools, and knowledge that may mitigate some of the circumstances affecting student performance. Using these key questions will help guide your planning in connecting teacher expectations about preparedness to parents' understanding:



Have teachers provided a class list of needed supplies to students at the beginning of the year?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Have teachers provided guidelines and expectations for student testing?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Have teachers provided a daily schedule for students?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the teacher send a newsletter home with students?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Are agendas or student planners required or provided?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Did the teacher provide expectations for classroom behavior?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Did the teacher provide a classroom social contract?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No

My Thoughts

Homework Policies

Another effective way to work closely with teachers and staff is to become familiar with the district, school, and/or individual teacher's homework policy. Begin by becoming informed about district and school homework policies if they exist. Next, discover what each teacher requires above and beyond established homework guidelines. By becoming familiar with homework policies, you will be able to clearly define what is expected of both the student and the parent. Reviewing each topic and using these key questions will help you gather information about homework policies and expectations:

Homework Policy

- Is there a district policy on homework?
- Is there a school policy on homework
- Do individual teachers have their own homework policies?

Homework Procedures

- How often is homework assigned?
- What is the policy on late homework?
- What is the policy on make-up work?
- Is homework graded?
- Does homework receive credit?

Support and Resources

- Is there a mechanism for homework help?
- When is help available?
- How do students and parents access support?
- What is the parental role or what is expected of parents?

Parental Expectations

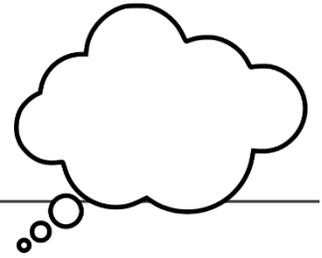
In this final section, we will explore what is needed to understand teachers' expectations of parents' involvement. To begin, discover how parent engagement is defined at your school. As the parent representative, this is an excellent topic of discussion that you may bring to leadership meetings. Your discussion may include to the following topics:

- ✓ Defining what parent engagement means to your school
- ✓ Procedures for parents visiting the classroom
- ✓ Expectations for special occasions i.e. parent bringing treats or items to celebrate a birthday

- ✓ Accepting telephone calls from parents
- ✓ Ways for parents to contact teachers and stay informed
- ✓ Parent portal, such as PowerSchool, access or other ways for parents to view student grades.
- ✓ Expectations for attending Parent-Teacher conferences
- ✓ Student handbook i.e. illnesses, emergency contact, etc.

Now take a moment to review this section and reflect on what you have learned and how you will apply your new learning!

My Reflections



1. What are the key messages for me from each section?

(a) Behavioral Expectations

(b) School Preparedness

(c) Homework Policies

(d) Parental Expectations

2. What are my next steps?

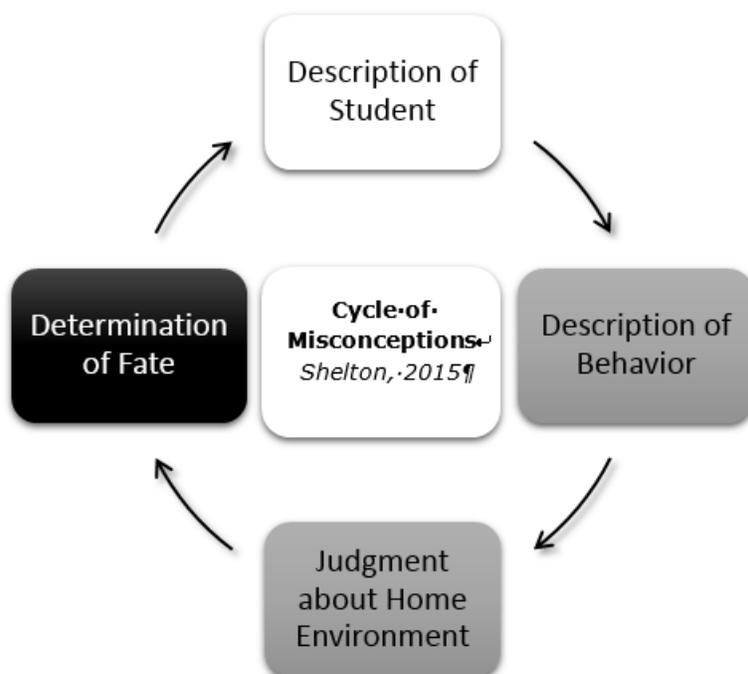
3. What further support/learning will I need?

Breaking the Cycle of Misconceptions

The home dynamics for all children are usually multifaceted and complex. Some children experience more difficulties due to family circumstances while others have more positive experiences regardless of family circumstances. No matter the dynamics, children's actions reflect those circumstances (both negatively and positively) throughout the school day.

As the Parent Liaison, you have the unique opportunity to get to know both the student and the parents' context. Your insight can help "break the cycle of misconceptions" that educators often have about particular students and their behaviors. By examining the cycle of misconceptions definition and reviewing the example below about DeAndre, you may see more clearly how misconceptions affect a student and how your role as a Parent Liaison might aide in minimizing preconceptions and misconceptions about students and their families. Answering the questions and using will assist you in planning ahead. The planning template will help you organize how you would address these issues as they arise throughout the year!

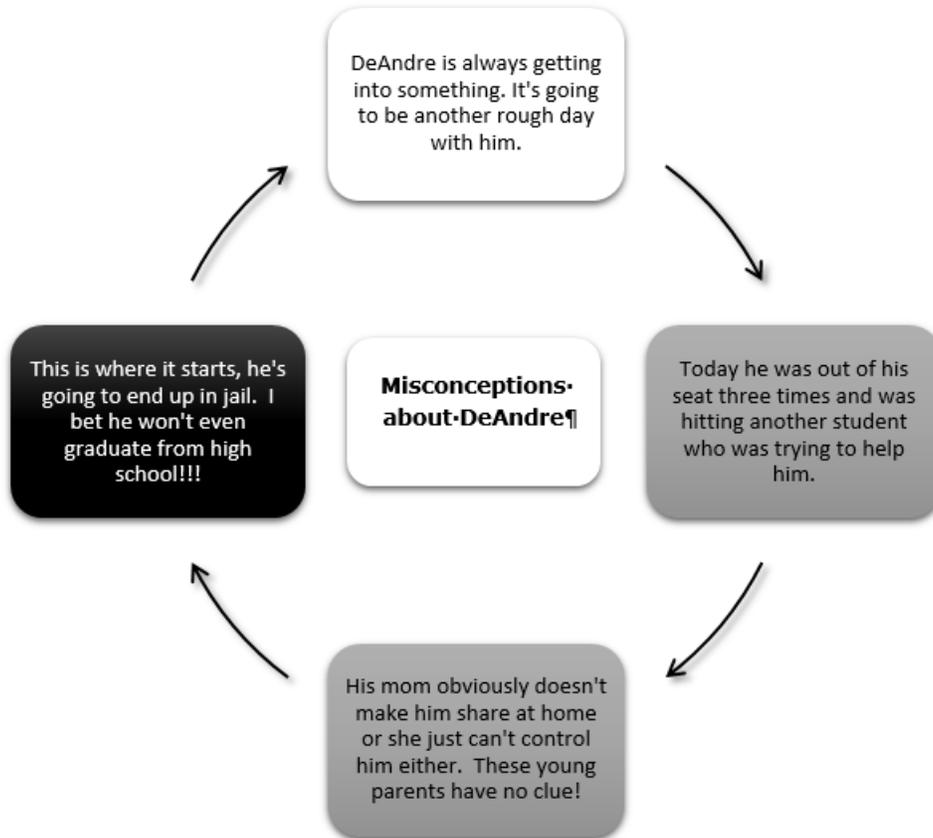
Cycle of Misconceptions



Before you examine the comments in each box about DeAndre, think about these basic concepts:

- There are four basic functions of behavior (why children do what they do)
 1. To seek attention
 2. To avoid attention or escape a situation
 3. To obtain a tangible or access an item (i.e. they want to use the computer)
 4. Automatic reinforcement or sensory stimulation (such as rocking back and forth, rubbing one's arm after falling)

Example: Misconceptions about DeAndre



Now reflect on how you might respond when being involved in this type of conversation. Think about your role as a Parent Liaison. Use these prompts to examine how your role might mitigate or lessen misconceptions:

- Getting to know the child.
- Getting to know the parents/guardians.
- Providing accurate information about the family.
- Providing a safe zone for parents to be involved at the school.

Action Planning Template for Breaking the Cycle of Misconceptions

What is the Perception Being Shared about the Student?

Key Questions:

Do you know the student? Yes No

Have you made contact with the parent or guardian? Yes No

What do you know about the family dynamics?

Are you able to share this information with the teacher? Yes No

What are your Thoughts on Addressing the Assumptions? (See black box in diagram)

Working Closely with Parents

As a Parent Liaison, your role may sound self-explanatory. However, knowing how to work with parents and what your limitations are as a Parent Liaison may not always be clear. This section will provide you with some ideas to help you develop your role and responsibilities for working with parents and families on a day-to-day basis.

Being a Cultural Broker

We know that stock and real estate brokers mediate deals between clients and potential buyers. That same principal can be applied to the dynamic and complicated issues of cultural congruency. A Cultural Broker is someone who is bi-cultural or multi-cultural (has the ability to understand and navigate in more than one cultural type). This person is well immersed in two or more culturally identified groups (i.e. ethnicity, race, socio-economic status, single-parent homes, neighborhoods, etc.). Being an effective Parent Liaison also means being an effective Cultural Broker. Knowing the cultural dynamics of your school, community, and neighborhoods and using that knowledge in a way that will contribute to and foster healthy relationships between home and school is the heart of being an effective Parent Liaison and Cultural Broker.

By being an effective Cultural Broker, you will be able to maneuver between settings and groups in a way that will build continual trust and respect. You will be able to prepare individuals and groups for encountering the nuances, values, and both written, and unwritten rules that govern the cultural dynamics of a particular group.

Providing Mediation

A review of the anecdote below about Angela Smart, a Parent Liaison at Happy Day Elementary, and how she used her experience as a cultural broker and mediator to ensure a safe and respectful space for discussion to occur between parents and school administrators may provide some ideas for you.

Angela Smart
Setting the Stage to Success!

Angela Smart is the Parent Liaison for Happy Day Elementary School. Angela has been working closely with Ms. Flowers, the school principal, to gather familial information on a student who is at-risk of being suspended. Ms. Flowers would like to meet with the student's parents but has not had great success in having meaningful and respectful conversations with them. The parent's interaction and experience has had, quite frankly, a very negative impact on them as well. Angela feels that she will be able to make a difference this time as a cultural broker and mediator. She requests to meet with the parents first, on neutral ground in their own community. Her meeting consists of providing the parents with the tools needed to navigate the education system and the norms that are expected when dealing with other adults in a professional situation. Key to Angela's success was sharing her understanding and empathy as a parent and acknowledging that it is sometimes difficult to be objective when dealing with issues involving our own children.

The parents had the opportunity to share their frustrations and receive coaching from Angela. Angela shared this information with the principal. Ms. Flowers was able to better understand their perspective and to have time to think about how to approach the situation with a more optimistic attitude. Once both parties were better informed about the other, the meeting was a success!

Reflection: What tools and norms do you think Angela shared with the parents? How does this apply to your current role?

My Reflections



1. What are the key messages for me from the example?

2. How will I apply this information to my context?

3. What further support/learning will I need?

Conducting Home Visits



Policies and procedures for conducting home visits will vary from district to district and school to school. For this reason, knowing what your district and school's policies and procedures are for conducting home visits will be key to your planning. Begin by determining if home visits will be a part of your job. Next, review any existing policy on conducting home visits. The topics in this section can be used as guides when reviewing or developing policy and procedures.

Purpose for a Home Visit

If conducting home visits is an expectation of your role, be clear on why home visits are necessary. Work with your principal and SIG Coordinator to establish criteria to identify who receives a home visit (i.e. regular weekly visits, only in cases of emergencies, etc...). Be prepared to share this information with your families. Also, think about the level of trust that must be established when gaining access to someone's home. By being transparent, you will be able to establish a relationship with families that is built on mutual respect and trust.

Safety and Security

Most home visit policies include criteria or steps for ensuring safety and security. Review the policy or create procedures that address how home visits should be conducted. For example, do the procedures require that home visits be conducted with two adults present from the school, or that a method of checking in with your administrator is established, or any other type of procedure be in place that always informs others of your intended location?

Next, review or work with your principal or SIG Coordinator to create policy and procedures that specifically address security protocols. In other words, what are the safeguards if you find yourself in the middle of a domestic dispute or familial argument? When conducting home visits, all of these scenarios should be considered. Often when parents are frustrated with the school, their reaction may be perceived as hostile or combative. It is key that you keep in mind that many home-school correspondence are grounded in negative interactions. You can research what the climate and culture is

around teacher-parent interaction by simply collecting data on the number of positive communications, i.e. phone calls versus the number of negative ones. Here is an opportunity for you to work closely with your Data Coach and SIG Coordinator to collect and provide the staff with vital information. In addition, this information will better inform you about the parents in your school and what their individual experiences and expectations have been and are!

Confidentiality and Professionalism

Key to building and maintaining trust with your families is having and sharing policy and procedures on confidentiality and professionalism. For most people, the home is the most personal space that exists. As individuals, we all live to the best of our means. Everyone, to some degree, experiences the need for acceptance and approval. When entering one's home, it is imperative not to reserve judgement and not to share information about the home with others. The exception, of course, would be issues of child endangerment. See the section on mandatory reporting to better understand your obligations as a school official.

Understanding Boundaries and Respecting Cultural Norms

One significant aspect of your role as a Parent Liaison is to be aware of boundaries and cultural norms. Start by thinking about the information you need to know. This may entail creating a list of questions and ideas to share with your SIG Coordinator or administrator to determine the appropriateness and applicability. You could also create this list through an informal parent focus group discussion. Reviewing these examples before you get started will be helpful:

Possible Appropriate Questions or Topics of Discussion	Possible Awkward or Inappropriate Questions or Topics of Discussion
How many children do you have attending Happy Day School?	How many people are living in this house?
Will DeAndre's father be part of educational decisions?	Are you married? Or Do you have a boyfriend?
Would you be interested in receiving information on resources that assist with child care, etc...?	How do you pay your bills?

Scheduling Visits and Providing Notification

If it is determined that home visits will be a part of your job, think about developing a schedule that does not consume your time and take you away from other activities and projects you have planned. However, if the purpose of home visits is more of an impromptu visit to check on a student or to contact the family, for example, think about developing protocol for this as well. You may want to standardize your message using prompts like:

- I hope I am not intruding...
- We don't normally visit without notification, however...
- Please forgive the short notice...

When scheduling visits, provide notification of the visit as a best practice. Be on time. Be flexible if you are waiting at the home for someone to arrive. And always give advance notice if you are detained, need to cancel or reschedule. Parents may become less trusting of you if you do not show up when expected. Apply the same protocols and procedures for follow-up visits.

Mandatory Reporting

Educator credentials and state laws obligate teachers and administrators to report suspicion of child abuse and neglect. As a parent liaison, district policies may or may not apply to you. If home visitations are a part of your role as a Parent Liaison, consult your SIG Coordinator and site Administrator to determine policy and procedure around mandatory reporting. If mandatory reporting applies to you, discuss ways to inform parents of this obligation at the beginning of the year.

Resources

The Parent-Teacher Home Visit Project: <http://www.pthvp.org/>

Or contact our Michigan Affiliate:

Shannon Perry, Deputy Director, Detroit Parent Network,
sperry@detroitparentnetwork.org 313-309-8105
Jason Salhaney, Romulus, jpsalhaney@romulus.k12.mi.us

A Guide to Team Home Visits, San Francisco Unified School District:
<http://www.schoolhealthcenters.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/A-Guide-to-Team-Home-Visits.pdf>

Creating a Parent Center

The design, development, and implementation of a Parent Center can be a huge endeavor for a school for many reasons. Often, challenges exist in securing a desirable location, creating procedures and protocols that allow for on-campus parent involvement, and establishing meaningful activities for engaging parents in their child's education. However, the many benefits of having a parent center outweigh the challenges. By creating a space on your school campus for parents to interact with one another, teachers, staff, and administrators, the Parent Liaison can facilitate a healthy connection between home and school. Consider this excerpt from *Simply Better: Doing What Matters Most to change the Odds for Student Success* by Bryan Goodwin:

Teachers are the most important factor inside school, but the most important factor, in general, remains the student's home environment. The good news here is that a student's home environment is not simply a function of her parents' level of income, education, or occupational status. As Marzano notes, the more malleable aspects of home environment—namely, parents' reading to their children, helping them with homework, encouraging them to go to college, and taking them to the library and cultural events—accounts for as much as 33 percent of the perceived variance in student achievement, far more than less malleable measures such as parents' level of income, education, and occupation (which combined, account for only 10 percent of the variance in student achievement) (White, 1982, cited in Marzano, 2000 as cited in Goodwin, 2011)

Reviewing each section below will assist you in developing an effective parent center or rethinking the current parent center at your school.

Proposing a Plan

If a Parent Center is needed on your campus and you would like to design and develop one, start with your leadership team. Bring a comprehensive proposal to the team to discuss and receive feedback. A Parent Center is a huge endeavor and should not be created in isolation. Many components of the Parent Center can be supported using SIG funds. For this reason, it is important that your voice is represented on the leadership team as budgets, school plans, and the Unpacking Tool are developed.

What's in the Plan?

At minimum, your plan should include the following; (a) Function/Purpose, (b) Location, (c) Alignment to school policy, (d) Parent Recruitment, (e) Projects and Activities, and (f) Program Monitoring and Evaluation and Sustainability. Review each section below to develop a proposal to bring to your leadership team. Continue developing your proposal to create a comprehensive plan.

Function/Purpose

With any plan, you should begin by clearly stating the function and purpose of the project. Think about what you have envisioned, ideas that have been shared, and/or other parent centers you have experienced. These guiding questions will help to develop your purpose:

- Who will be involved or participating at the center?
- Does the participation align with school goals, guidelines, and the reform plan and efforts?
- What are the expected end results, deliverables, and/or outcomes of having a parent center?

By using these guiding questions, you should be able to develop a one or two paragraph statement of purpose that is clear and concise to all stakeholders.

Location

On most school campuses, issues of space and location are usual. In fact, space is often referred to as “prime real estate.” If you have a location in mind, bring this idea to the leadership team. If you do not have a location, do some research and find out what spaces may be or may become available. Work closely with your SIG Coordinator and your administrators in securing viable options.

Design and Funding Sources

Once a location has been identified, consider the following:

- Physical layout and design
- Equipment
- Technology
- Furniture
- Supplies

Create a tentative list with costs and quantities to add to the proposal. Although your SIG funds may cover many of these expenses, continue to seek out alternative funding sources and resources such as surplus centers, donations from local businesses, and other grant funding.

Alignment to School Policy

When bringing non-school personnel onto campus, particularly on a regular basis, it is imperative that you are aware of all district and school policies. One of the policies that often has the potential to create legal issues is the policy and laws surrounding confidentiality. If you are not aware of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act or FERPA, review this information at:

<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html>

This Act protects students and their parents’ rights to privacy of student education records. Discuss your role with your administrator to see how and when FERPA regulations apply to you. In your proposal, address confidentiality by acknowledging local, state, and federal policies and guidelines. Consider developing protocols for the Parent Center that will reflect your effort to build trust with your parents.

When parents interact with students other than their own, your school and district may require background checks and clearances. Consult your SIG Coordinator and administrators to see what this process may entail. If you plan on having parents in classrooms or on the playground or gym, district policy may require these official checks.

Parent Recruitment

In your proposal, create an outline of your recruitment plan. Just because you open a Parent Center does not mean parents will come! Think about ways to recruit parents and community members that will not only bring them to the center but will maintain their involvement. A good recruitment plan will include advertisement, literature on the center, expectations, and most importantly, why their participation is crucial to their own child's academic success.

Turning the Tide!

Be proactive in developing a Parent Center that will be taken seriously. Think about how to create that delicate balance between creating a space where parents and community can feel welcome and useful without allowing your Parent Center to become a hangout and a place where gossip is born and spread. Use this opportunity to teach parents and community about the acceptable ways to communicate with teachers, administrators, and other parents when issues arise involving their child.

Projects and Activities

Now that you have a proposal that describes the purpose of the center, where the center will be located and how it will be designed, how you will recruit and maintain parent and community participation, it is time to develop tentative projects and activities. Reviewing the list below will give you some ideas on how to get your parents and community involved with the school's turnaround efforts and student academic achievement and success.

Activities

Think about the following activities. Determine what already occurs at your campus and how it may be improved and consider other activities on the list that would work well for welcoming and maintaining parent

and community participation. Using the Unpacking Tool will help you to determine activities that support the intervention model:

- Parent Nights:
 - Focus on Reading/Literacy
 - Focus on Math/Numeracy
 - Culture and Climate
 - Understanding Priority School Status
 - English Learners and Language Acquisition
 - Foreign Language Learning
- Donuts with Dad/Muffins with Mom
- Coffee with the Principal
- Life skills training
- Technology training
- Health, wellness and nutrition

Projects

- Mentorship programs
- Classroom aide programs
- Parenting Classes
- Advisory Committees
- Fundraising

Additionally, consider offering your teachers parent services such as:

- Photocopying
- Cutting and pasting, counting and sorting
- Lesson preparation of hands-on materials
- Assisting with maintaining bookrooms

Program Monitoring and Evaluation

You are now to the final stage of developing your proposal. A key component to success of your Parent Center is monitoring and evaluating its implementation. Although this may sound complicated, it is one of the easiest tasks to develop. When you monitor and evaluate for implementation, you simply hold yourself and others accountable for doing what you said you would do! In other words, take each component of your proposal and plan and ask these critical questions. By tracking the responses, you will be able to monitor your progress and evaluate the outcomes:

- **What is the timeline for implementation of this task** (deadline, due date, event date, etc...)?
- **Who are the responsible individuals for each step of the task** (Parent Liaison will secure the date and location, parent X and Y will make banners, parent Z will be responsible for sign in sheet, tallying, and returning original to Parent Liaison)?
- **How will you measure the success of your event** (number of parents attending, number of parents attending compared to previous and similar events, participant surveys)?
- **Who will review the monitoring and evaluation data** (leadership team, parent involvement committee, teacher and staff at a staff meeting)?
- **What are your next steps** (how do we improve this process, how do we replicate this process, how can we involve a larger or different audience not in attendance)?

Sustainability of a project is always initially discussed but often falls to the wayside as the idea or project comes to fruition. Beginning and maintaining a sustainability plan for your Parent Center and all of the projects you develop along the way will help assure implementation and continuation!

Developing a Plan

Now that you have developed a proposal, presented it to your leadership team, SIG Coordinator, and/or administrators, it is time to develop the plan. Your proposal acts as an outline or framework for developing a plan for the Parent Center. Having a comprehensive plan better prepares you for successful implementation. Using your proposal as a starting point, develop your plan by doing the following:

Provide Detail

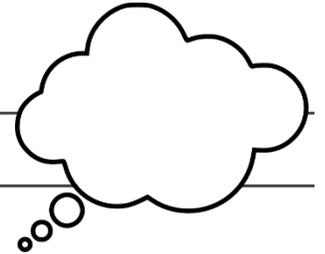
Going component-by-component, provide as much detail as possible. Your description should answer any questions that may be asked by someone who is completely unfamiliar with your center. Use the critical components of the monitoring and evaluation of your center to assist you in providing more detail as well:

- Timeline: each component should have a timeline, due date, and/or event date.
- Assignment of tasks.
- Identify and connect equipment, technology, and/or materials to each component

Use the Action Planning template to assist you in developing a comprehensive and viable plan!

My Reflections

1. What are the key messages for me from this section?



2. What are my next steps??

3. What further support/learning will I need?

Action Planning Template for Developing a Parent Center-Part 1

Summarize how having a Parent Center will support Turnaround Efforts:

Key Questions:

Do you have a location? Yes No

Is the location conducive to welcoming parents and community into the school? Yes No

What is the primary function of the Center?

List Activities and Projects you anticipate developing:

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

List who will support you:

Action Planning Template for Developing a Parent Center-Part 2

Describe how you will monitor each activity or project:

September	October	November
December	January	February
March	April	May
June	July	August

Describe how you will monitor each activity or project:

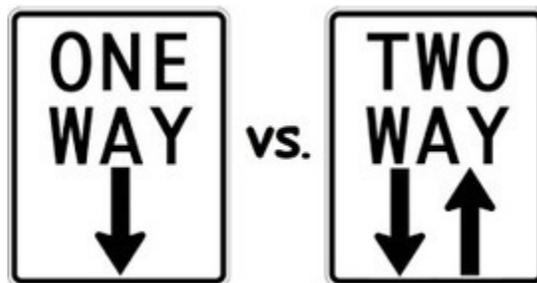
List all materials, furniture, technology, and supplies needed:

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Developing Two-Way Communication Strategies

An area of focus in school reform is parent engagement. More specifically, developing two-way communication strategies is often a requirement for the school. One way to fulfill this need is to develop a communication plan. These plans are usually developed absent parent representation since most Priority schools do not have a Parent Liaison. The School Improvement Grant requires that all schools have a Parent Liaison and, as discussed earlier in this guide, that she should be a member of a leadership team focused on implementing the intervention model and turnaround efforts.

What is Two-Way Communication?



Many communication plans describe basic activities such as creating a newsletter, conducting Robocalls (automated phone calls), creating email distribution lists (i.e. Listserv), and sending an email blasts to parents and community. While these methods of communication can be highly effective, they do not entirely fulfill the requirement of creating “two-way” communication. Look at the graphic above and think about ways that you communicate or would like to communicate with your parents. Thinking about the flow of information will help you determine whether or not your communication strategy is one-way or two-way.

Developing Effective Two-way Communication Strategies

While it may be important to get timely or vital information out to parents and community, developing and establishing two-way communication strategies is equally important. As the Parent Liaison, your work hinges on effective and open communication. Consider how you might incorporate two-way communication strategies in your work and how you may provide ideas and suggestions to other stakeholders.

Working with other parent organizations on campus

When developing two-way communication strategies, think about other parent organizations and groups that are already established on your campus. Getting to know and working with them could be highly beneficial. These groups often have effective two-way communication strategies that haven't been used over years. The checklist below will assist in planning your next steps in getting to know and working with existing parent organizations and groups at your school.

Key Questions:

Do you have a PTA (Parent-Teacher Association)? Yes No

Who is the President or Chairperson?

Do you have a PTO (Parent-Teacher Organization)? Yes No

Who is the President or Chairperson?

Do you have Booster Clubs? Yes No

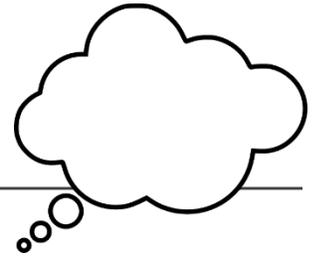
Who is the President or Chairperson?

Do you have other Parent Advisory Committees? Yes No

Who is the Chairperson?

Summarize a plan to become involved or connected with each group:

My Reflections



1. What are the key messages for me from this section?

2. What are my next steps?

3. What further support/learning will I need?

Collecting Evidence—Documenting your Work!

Now that you have become familiar with the school's intervention plan, your role as a Parent Liaison, and how to develop activities and projects, it is time to create a method of collecting evidence and documenting your work. Review and reflect on this next section which asks two key questions; (a) Why collect evidence, and b) How do I document my work?

Why collect evidence?

Collecting evidence that demonstrates effectiveness and level of implementation is an embedded requirement of working with a School Improvement Grant. Often, we function on a belief that something works well or doesn't work at all based on little or no evidence. Your work as a Parent Liaison and its impact cannot be assumptive. In both rapid turnaround and continuous improvement, a basic tenet of success is collecting evidence to demonstrate effectiveness. It is here that we engage in collaborative conversations about the possible outcomes of your endeavors. These outcomes can have positive, negative, and/or no effect at all in improving student success and academic achievement. By collecting evidence, you will be able to determine to what degree of effectiveness your project or activity has.

How do I document my work?

Documentation of your work is also an embedded requirement of working with a School Improvement Grant. When requesting and receiving SIG funding, a fundamental compliance indicator is used to demonstrate that expenditures align with approved activities. By documenting your work, this alignment can be demonstrated clearly. Your work may be documented in multiple ways, both mandatory and self-imposed. This next section discusses types of documentation.

Personal Activity Records

If you are funded by multiple sources, the federal guidelines require that you keep Personal Activity Records (PARS). Personal Activity Records, or PARS, are the required documentation by law when a grant-funded position has more than one cost objective. In other words, if a percentage of your salary

is funded using SIG and the remaining percentage is funded using general funds, you are required to document and demonstrate your work under both cost objectives.

Reports

Weekly, monthly, quarterly, semi-annual, and annual reports or activity logs are all viable ways to document your work. The frequency in which these reports are generated is a topic of a collaborative conversation between you and your administrator and SIG Coordinator. The format in which you report out should also be determined through a collaborative conversation with your administrator and SIG Coordinator.

Sign-in Sheets

Sign-in sheets serve dual roles; they are both documentation and evidence. As documentation, they serve as proof of attendance, justification for supplies purchased, and length and duration of meetings and activities. Best practices include, for example, attaching the event flyer to the sign-in sheet, including agendas and email communications.

As evidence, they can be manipulated to study and examine trends, i.e. attendance, demographics, grade-level participation, etc. By collecting the name of the child represented by the parent in attendance, you may be able to connect parent engagement with student success. This is another perfect opportunity for you to work closely with your Data Coach who can provide you valuable insight on manipulating and examining your data.

Lastly, sign-in sheets can also be used to collect and maintain current records of attendees for future communications. Sign-in sheets should be designed to capture relevant information that will assist you knowing your parents and maintaining current and up-to-date information on your families. Consider some of the headings listed below when developing sign-in sheets:

- | | | |
|----------------|-------------------|---------------------------|
| ✓ Name | ✓ Child's Name | ✓ Available Time |
| ✓ Signature | ✓ Child's Grade | ✓ Language spoken at home |
| ✓ Address | ✓ Child's Teacher | |
| ✓ Phone Number | ✓ Meeting Time | |
| ✓ Email | Preferences | |

Other Ways to Document your Work and Collect Evidence

Multiple ways may be used to document your work and collect evidence. Two of the most practical and effective strategies are surveys and evaluations. Creating surveys and evaluations that collect valid data takes planning. By working collaboratively with your SIG Facilitator, Data Coach, and Site Administrator, you will be able to create and design surveys and evaluations that can provide valuable information that will help shape your work. Some helpful tips are provided below for designing, administering, and collecting surveys and evaluations.

Surveying Parents and Community Stakeholders

Many types of surveys and many ways to survey your stakeholders. Work closely with your colleagues when designing survey questions and analyzing results. Consider using tools such as SurveyMonkey®, Google Survey, or other web-based survey software. Always keep in mind the following when designing and administering surveys:

- Target group or population to survey
- Purpose for survey
- Specific information being gathered
- Length of survey
- Amount of time required to complete the survey
- Ways of sending the survey to your participants or having access to the survey

Next, think about how your survey results will be collected, organized, and analyzed. Many commercial surveys include analytical functions. However, someone still needs to gather and organize the information. Again, working closely with your Data Coach will prove to be an effective partnership.

Project/Activity Evaluations

As you develop and implement projects, activities, and events for your parents and their children, you will want to be able to measure the success or effectiveness of your work. One way to measure success/effectiveness is to develop an evaluation for each activity. To capture accurate information, evaluations should be given to participants as soon as possible once the activity has concluded.

Like surveys, many types of evaluations and ways to collect information exist. The same commercial software may be used to design and administer evaluations or you may choose to create evaluations that are less formal and more tailored to the activity. Consider using these prompts when designing evaluations for your activities:

- Was this event/activity hosted at a good time?
- Did you find this event/activity useful?
 - Please explain your response
- Would you recommend this event/activity to other parents?
- Would you attend this event/activity again?
- How can we improve this event/activity?
- How will you apply your learning from the event/activity?

Remember, keeping documentation and collecting evidence are both best practices. Whether or not documentation and evidence is a requirement, this practice will allow you to capture valuable information to review and analyze as you plan and develop next steps. An effective Parent Liaison can always demonstrate effectiveness of her work.

Participating in Professional Learning

An effective Parent Liaison is always informed about the work in the field. Gaining perspective from other parent engagement personnel is critical to your professional growth. Remember that professional learning is a required component of the reform models. Your professional learning activities should be reflected in the Unpacking Tool and should not be based on last minute decisions. As a Parent Liaison, you may participate in professional learning in multiple ways. In this section, four professional learning activities will be shared as well as ways to maximize your experience with each. For the purpose of this guide, workshops and trainings are defined as two distinct professional learning activities.

Workshops refer to professional learning where participants are engaged in the process of learning and leaving the session with a work product that can be used or implemented immediately. Key to understanding workshops is the expectation of active participation by participants. Therefore, the role of the presenter is to act as a facilitator.

Trainings refer to a type of professional learning where participants attend sessions to learn a skill(s) and/or to acquire information to be incorporated into practice. Many trainings offer certificates or some type of certification. Therefore, the role of the presenter is to train or guide the learning.

Reviewing this section on participating in professional learning and creating a plan of action will keep you up-to-date and well-informed about resources, practices, and programs that have demonstrated success for students and their families!

Networking Meetings

One requirement of the School Improvement Grant is to participate in SIG Networking Meetings. These meetings are designed to provide a venue where staff can come together and share best practices. Check with your SIG Coordinator to reserve the dates of Networking Meetings planned for the year. This is your opportunity to get to know and connect with other Parent Liaisons across the state. Consider these suggestions to get the most out of your experience:

- Bring business cards and contact information to share with other Parent Liaisons.
- Create a notebook so you can collect the contact information of other Parent Liaisons. This notebook could also be used to collect information about programs, the activities, and the events that other schools host for their parents.
- Invite other Parent Liaisons to come and visit your school. This school visit could simply be sharing what you are doing or maybe soliciting ideas to incorporate at your site.

Workshops

On and off-site workshops offer an opportunity to actively participate with the facilitator and other participants. To be an effective Parent Liaison, you must be willing to become actively engaged and not just be an observer. If attending workshops is an opportunity for you to gain professional learning, consider these suggestions to maximize your experience:

- Review the workshop agenda to ensure that the workshop applies to your work.
- Come with a mindset to work cooperatively and to be an active participant.
- When in doubt, ask clarifying questions to better understand how the workshop techniques apply to your setting or practice.
- Set goals to leave the workshop with a minimum number of ideas and practices to apply to you work.
- Get to know someone and invite them to be your workshop buddy

Trainings

On and off-site trainings offer an opportunity to increase your knowledge and understanding of your practice. To be an effective Parent Liaison, you must be willing to commit the time that is often required for trainings. If attending trainings is an opportunity for you to gain professional learning, consider these suggestions to maximize your experience:

- Review all documentation about the training. Often times, you are expected to come prepared by reviewing materials or providing information ahead of time.

- Be sure to determine the training schedule. One-day trainings are common but multiple day trainings over time are much more prevalent in the field. If your training spans several days throughout the course of the year, be sure to secure those dates on your calendar and follow through with the commitment.
- Be sure to purchase all of the necessary materials required or recommended by the training host. Registration fees do not always include these materials.
- Although SIG funds may not be used to pay for college credit, think about alternative resources or personal financing to earn college credit if the training offers it. Your professional growth can and should extend beyond your current position.

Conferences

While conferences provide multiple opportunities for professional learning and growth, they can sometimes be overwhelming. Most large-scale conferences offer multiple sessions covering multiple topics over several days. They are usually hosted in popular cities or regions and travel is most likely required. All of this can make for a memorable and exhausting experience. If you are planning to attend conferences, consider these suggestions to get the most out of your experience:

- Connect with others at your school to accompany you. Because your job is based on issues and activities surrounding the home-school relationship, you may not be able to find someone with the same interests to attend. Consider collaborating with and teaming up other Parent Liaisons that you know from Networking Meetings.
- Download detailed conference schedules and agendas to review in advance what sessions will be offered. Study the sessions and make selections ahead of time. This will allow you to attend the conference with specific goals in mind.

**Note: don't forget to choose alternative sessions as many sessions fill up or are cancelled last minute.*
- If traveling out of town and/or overnight, make arrangements in advance to secure timely travel and lodging that is close to the event.

Professional Learning Reflection

1. What professional learnings am I interested in attending?

2. What are my next steps?

3. What further support/learning will I need?

Using SIG Funds to Support your Work

The last section of the guide provides information on funding your projects and activities using school improvement grant monies. Additionally, alternative funding sources that may be available to support your work will be listed. Begin by conducting a simple needs assessment or inventory check to see what your school, district, and community partners may have to offer to support your plan. Next review the School Improvement Grant Budget Development Toolkit located on the Michigan Department of Education website to better understand how SIG funds may be used.

Review the Budget Toolkit

This toolkit will provide you with information about purchases that are allowable, reasonable, and connecting to the big ideas of your strategic plan. Your SIG coordinator may ask you to develop your own budget or spending plan. By becoming familiar with and utilizing the budget toolkit, you will be well-informed and prepared to request purchases that will support your parent engagement efforts. The list of topics below will most likely reflect the types of purchases you will be requesting. Using the budget toolkit, you can review the process and procedure for making purchases of the items listed below as well as how they may connect to your work, projects, and activities:

Equipment & Supplies

Your position will most likely be a new to the school. Purchasing equipment to get you started is a viable use of SIG funds. Think about the type of equipment you may need both short and long term. Consider purchasing office supplies, books, notebooks, organizers and any other office items. Remember to plan for what you need to conduct the events and activities you have planned.

Events and Field experiences

When planning events and activities, you will want to consider budgets for refreshments and cost of venues. Plan your year accordingly to ensure that your request are well thought out and not last-minute.

Furniture

A popular request from Parent Liaisons in the past is for the purchase of furniture. Although federal funds typically are not allowable for this use, in the case of developing a parent center or parent area, SIG funds may be used to create this space. Again, refer to the toolkit to gain a better understanding about what is allowable.

Professional Learning

A major focus of the intervention models is to provide on-going, job-embedded professional learning opportunities. Often times in the planning stages of the grant's budget, this category is heavily emphasized. However, the focus is usually on staff and administrators. It is imperative that your professional learning needs are a part of these collaborative conversations and that your needs are addressed and met equally.

Technology

Like equipment and supplies, technology will most likely have to be purchased for you in this new position. Consider securing a desktop or laptop with a station, and a dedicated printer as a part of your work station. Then consider purchasing desktop computers, tablets, printer, an LCD projector, an Interactive whiteboard, digital camera(s) and video camera(s) for your parent center and/or to support your parent activities. These purchases are all acceptable expenditures using SIG funding.

Travel expenses

Finally, remember to consider how much travel will play a part of your day-to-day routine. If you are conducting home visits, attending regular meetings, and/or events off campus, you will need to plan for travel expenses such as mileage, hotel, and meals. Again, these are all allowable expenditures using SIG funds.

Develop a Spending Plan

By working with your SIG Coordinator and site administrators, as well as participating on the leadership team, you will have the needed support to develop a spending plan or budget that will support your parent engagement efforts. The first step in this process is to be an active participant and

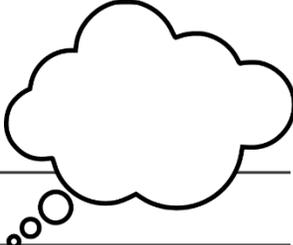
contributor to the Unpacking Tool process. Every purchase must be meaningful and connect to your overall parent engagement goals. Your spending plan format should be created to meet your needs. Developing a comprehensive plan will help avoid last minute request that could be denied. Refer to the budget toolkit to ensure that your spending plan stays within the required guidelines for using SIG dollars.

Locate Other Funding Sources

Multiple funding sources may be used to support your work. Working closely with your SIG Coordinator and site administrators, you will be able to determine what those sources are and how they can be used. Identifying these sources early on will be key to developing a viable sustainability plan. Your work and efforts should not terminate with the grant. On the contrary, the work you do and the events and activities that you create should serve as a springboard to developing and implementing effective parent engagement activities that will last far beyond the life of the grant. By locating and transitioning your events and activities to alternate funding sources when possible, you begin to guarantee the sustainability of your work.

My Reflections

1. What are the key messages for me from this section?



2. What are my next steps?

3. What further support/learning will I need?

Conclusion

This guide has been developed as an effort to provide a consistent message with useful and applicable content. Use this information will guide your work as you become and/or continue to be an effective Parent Liaison. Sharing your ideas with others in the field and seeking out new ideas from your colleagues is an expectation. Remember the ultimate goal of your work is to increase student success. By working closely with the parents and community, you will ensure the opportunities for success for each and every student and family you touch.

“At the end of the day, the most overwhelming key to a child's success is the positive involvement of parents.”
- Jane D. Hull

Case Study

Now that you have reviewed the **Guide to Becoming an Effective Parent Liaison**, apply what you have learned to this case study. Think about how your involvement can be integral to improving the Technology Initiative described below!

Technology Initiative

Happy Day Elementary received a School Improvement Grant this year for the first time. In their strategic plan, they developed a technology initiative that would allow one-to-one iPads for each student in the school. This initiative connected to all of their “Big Ideas” for increasing literacy, numeracy, and improving culture and climate. Students would be expected to use their tablets during class and at home on a daily basis. The initiative was budgeted for \$200,000.00. This included iPads, cases, keyboards, and earbuds.

As the year went on, more and more students were not bringing their iPads to school. Teachers reported that many of the iPads were lost, stolen, and/or severely damaged. Cases and cords were also lost, damaged, and/or destroyed. Teachers became frustrated and were forced to improvise lessons and activities.

At the end of year one, the SIG Coordinator found that she had to budget for an additional \$30,000.00 in Year 2 for replacement iPads and accessories. During a collaborative conversation with a supervisor, it was discovered that the Parent Liaison was unaware of this initiative and had little or no knowledge about the expectations around the one-to-one initiative.

Using the questions provided below, identify key concepts discussed in this guide that would assist you in supporting the Technology Initiative. Now apply what you have learned to support actual initiatives in your school moving forward.

Technology Initiative: Being an Effective Parent Liaison

How might you become familiar with the Technology Initiative?

What are your thoughts on student's not bringing the iPad every day?

What are your ideas around minimizing lost, damage, and stolen equipment?

What role might you play in educating parents about school initiatives?

How can you apply your learning to current initiatives at your site?

What further support/learning do you need?

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