



BEYOND THE IEP

FAMILIES AND EDUCATORS WORKING
TOGETHER IN SCHOOL PROGRAMS

**Colorado Families for Hands & Voices in partnership
with the Colorado Department of Education**



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"I'll always remember the day I stood in front of a room full of people, where I was sharing the story of my involvement and advocacy strategies as a parent in navigating the medical and educational systems that were serving our family. One of the professionals raised her hand and commented, "I wish we had parents like you in our state." I was flattered, of course. But later as I began to reflect on that comment, I began to think of the many families I have had the honor to meet through my life, and realized -- of course there were 'other parents like me.' I knew that I was not born a natural advocate, and had learned the ropes along the way with the support of many others. For most parents, becoming an effective advocate for their child is something that is learned over time and modeled by other parents and the professionals who serve them."

– A parent from Colorado



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Introduction

Dear Families and Educators,

A team of professionals, educators, and parents who are passionate about collaboration and communication contributed to the development of this guide. We come from all walks of life, yet we all strongly agree on the importance of family involvement in a child's education.

Let's take a moment to look at some common definitions of the word involvement:

- Engagement; the act of sharing in the activities of a group
- A connection of inclusion
- Interest; a sense of concern or curiosity about someone or something
- Participation in regular, two-way, meaningful communication

What does the word involvement mean to you?

This booklet focuses on educator and family collaboration, specifically around children who are deaf or hard of hearing. When talking about educators, we include administrators, general education teachers, teachers of the deaf, interpreters, and others serving students who are deaf/hard of hearing. When talking about family, we include parents, siblings, grandparents, caregivers, relatives, and family friends. In the interest of working as a team as opposed to creating a hierarchy, we will address our readers, educators and parents, as equals. On the occasion that specific details pertain to families or educators, we indicate our audience.

Families: Have you ever felt that all your focus and energy belongs to the tedious process of preparing for IEP's (Individualized Education Program) once a year? What about the rest of the year when your child is working on these IEP goals everyday through meaningful experiences? We want you to feel informed and connected to your child's entire education. This means not only advocating for your child in an IEP meeting, but also being a daily presence in your child's education. Yes, that's right; it is your school too! We are not suggesting that you must be in school the same amount of time your child attends school, or even that you must set foot into the school every day. We simply mean that your connection to the greater school community is not only your right, but also your responsibility as a family member. Our goal is for you to understand your rights and effectively communicate your child's needs in order for him/her to develop and learn successfully.

Educators: Have you ever felt that family involvement is just one more thing added to your list? Have you ever planned a family event and three people showed up? Have you ever questioned why you plan these activities if no one is really interested? Maybe there are other strategies to en-

gaging families. When you think about your job as educators, direct interaction and learning with children is the first thought that often comes to mind. Though this is a primary requirement of your work, this is only a portion of what we should and can be doing. In order to fully support your students, it is imperative to involve the people who also know these children and care about them deeply; their families. It is important to note that even though educators might spend more waking time with children than families during some weekdays, families and caregivers know a different child than you do. If you combine the knowledge of both families and educators, you are much more likely to provide these children with a broader range of support than if you were to approach your work from your perspective alone. Collaboration and cooperation with families is one of the most important jobs you do. When these children leave your classroom and continue on their walks of life, their families will, with rare exception, continue along the path with them. For children who are deaf or hard of hearing (d/hh), this truth is even more evident. The risk of failure when a family is not involved is higher, and the benefits of involvement pay off even larger dividends when a family who must face additional considerations in their day to day life with their child is fully supported and involved in the educational process.

It is because the stakes are so high, the rewards so rich and the opportunities so varied that we believe the Family-Educator connection can become not just another “to-do” in already busy days but a source of encouragement, inspiration and support for all involved -- including the children who bring us together! The ideas presented here are gleaned from experience and designed to set you up for success in building significant relationships between home and school.

Sincerely,

The Colorado Families for Hands & Voices ‘Team’

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Chapter 1

Building the Foundation

“Successful family involvement is not a sporadic activity. It is a sustained commitment to instill the habits of learning and to set high expectations. It is making connections to teachers and schools not only when trouble arises, but as a part of the everyday process of children’s schooling.”

~ Richard W. Riley, Secretary of Education, 1994

It has been widely reported that parent involvement is critical to the success of students. A brief summary of some of the research conducted over the past 30 years identifies parent involvement as the one most important factor in student success in school (Henderson & Berla, 2000; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Epstein, 2001). Benefits of engaging families include higher reading scores, higher grades on homework, improved attitudes towards school, and improved relationships between parents and teachers (Donahoo, Saran, 2001). Families engaged in a child’s education contribute to positive results for students all the way through high school, including higher achievement, better attendance, more course credits earned, more responsible preparation for class, and other indicators of success in school (Catsambis, 2001; Simon, 2004). Authors explored whether school, family, and community factors independently and significantly affected students’ math achievement. Analyses indicated that students in poor neighborhoods had lower math achievement test scores, but this effect was ameliorated by ongoing parental involvement in high school. Sure, lower socioeconomic levels affect children, but clearly family engagement trumps annual income.

Families have many levels of possible involvement, each valuable and important to recognize and encourage. Dr. Joyce Epstein developed a model to understand these different types of involvement, shown in Figure 1.

Recognizing that families are operating at different levels, schools can collaborate with families to design a multitude of ways that different families could be supported. Any meaningful discussion about family involvement must include family members themselves. If getting families to the discussion table is difficult, consider having a draft document that classroom or lead teachers could share with families. Examples of questions to ask might include:

- What would encourage you as a parent to be more involved in your child’s education?
- Do you need flexible meeting times?
- Do you like “just in time” volunteer opportunities or do you prefer committing to year- long activities such as the once a month PTA meeting?

figure 1

How Schools Can Recognize and Facilitate Family Involvement Based on the Six Types of Parental Involvement

1. Parenting: Support families in their basic obligations to care for needs of the child for food, clothing, shelter, safety, nurturing in a variety of ways, from written information to home visits, workshops, and suggestions;
2. Communicating: Provide information about student progress, school programs, and facilitate communication between home and school beyond the annual conference time or IEP;
3. Volunteering: Provide opportunities for meaningful family involvement from home and at school, including training and opportunities for leadership, supporting a class, or partnering with other parents;
4. Learning at home: Provide ideas about how to support children with academic learning, including skills required for students in all subjects at each grade level, family participation in goal setting, course choices, helpful websites for various subjects, calendars and summer learning packets;
5. Decision making: Incorporate family participation in school governance, advisory councils, advocacy, district level committees and networks to link interested parent leaders;
6. Collaborating with the community: Identify and integrate resources from the community to strengthen curricular and extracurricular school programs, such as civic groups, alumni, parents with particular skillsets, recreational, cultural, health and business partnerships. Make room for exchanges with community organizations to participate in schoolwide improvement plans.

Adapted from Epstein, et al., (2009.) School, Family and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action (3rd edition.)

- Are you interested in developing as a leader or understanding your possible roles in the school community?
- How would you like to receive communication?
- How would you like to share your opinions?

Schools can build the foundation for parent inclusion from the beginning of the family's school career by clearly communicating a desire for families to be engaged and valuing their contributions. Families who know they are critical to the educational life of their children beyond the IEP meeting see the reward of their efforts in the successful, independent thinkers their own children can become.

An educator shares her reasons why professionals need to listen to parents and how children benefit when educators attend to relationships with parents:

1. Although we educators like to think our individual impact on a child with hearing loss lasts forever, in reality it only lasts for a brief time. A parent's impact lasts for the life of the child. For example, our society rightfully supports parent choice for communication options for children with hearing loss. A child's communication mode impacts every area of his life until he dies. A child's knowledge of double digit long division, the ability to predict the chromosomal outcomes based on Mendelsohn's genetic pea model, or to remember how to spell every word they ever studied for a spelling test...lots of people live very full lives without these impressive skills taught by professionals.
2. Parents are an educator's best ally when navigating the "white water" in the school system. Administration listens to a group of parents who speak with a united voice. As professionals in the classroom, we are quite aware that the administration rarely listens to us (unless we happen to agree with them). Life is much easier when a parent, especially a group of parents, supports you.
3. Parents are the medical professional's best ally in the medical field. After all, parents are the ones paying the bill and the medical model can't exist without clients. When parents feel their child's needs are not being met, they take their business elsewhere. To keep your clients, you need to listen to them to find out how to provide the best customer service.

4. There are a lot of parents in the world. And they vote. Any professional in the public sector understands how mill levies, bond issues and taxes have great impact on our salaries, working conditions, even our training in higher education systems.
5. Parents can move mountains and they will for the love of their child. As professionals, our clients and/or students benefit from our expertise, our concern, and often our love. Nevertheless, these benefits cannot begin to equal the power of a determined parent whose love for their child causes them to be powerful advocates at all levels of our society. Parents are frequently instruments of change – for the better. We see that all the time in our education system and in any other institution that provides service to children. Think about various Children’s Hospitals around the country that are constantly finding ways to make their practices be more “family-friendly.” These institutions listen to parents and make changes to provide better services.

Top Five Reasons Why Educators Need to Listen to Parents. Mathers, R. *The Hands & Voices Communicator* 2007 Winter Edition

Rebuilding Burned Bridges

Maybe you are reading this manual as a result of needing to re-establish a relationship that has been damaged. As a parent, you may have successfully advocated for a service your child needs, yet a schism in the relationship between you and the professionals working with your child has been created. Whether you are a parent or a professional, if you were on opposite sides of the fence, the debris created can result in anything but a feeling of collaboration. How do you rebuild the bridge? As one parent put it, “I wish I had never lost my cool with our school district’s Special Education Director. It felt good at the time, and I ‘won’ the battle I was fighting for, but then spent the next year working at regaining civility between us, so I could advocate for my daughter’s ongoing needs.” Whether it is the classroom teacher, a specialist, or any other professional that a parent has a ‘run-in’ with, it is important to keep your eye on the prize - successful outcomes for your child. If you are a professional who has found it difficult to work collaboratively with a parent, it is worth the time and energy to find a place of collaboration.

Here are a few tips on ‘rebuilding the bridge’:

- Remember who this is about – the child who is counting on you.
- Love may never mean having to say you’re sorry, but a collaborative process sure does! Admit your mistakes.
- Show your appreciation for the good stuff! Without sounding too sappy, we all need to hear what we’re doing right sometimes.
- Take the risk to trust that the other person is trying to move forward as well. Collaborate on the next goal, invite that person to work together again, leave the past in the past where possible.
- Change of attitude and beliefs comes through effective relationships. If you need to make change, you **MUST** build a relationship with the people on the child’s team.

“Children have never been very good at listening to their elders, but they have never failed to imitate them.

~ James Baldwin



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Chapter 2

DEAF education and deaf EDUCATION

The school will teach children how to read, but the environment of the home must teach them what to read. The school can teach them how to think, but the home must teach them what to believe.

~ Charles A. Wells

As detailed in the previous chapter, it is of utmost importance that families and educators work in collaboration to ensure successful educational outcomes. Educators have chosen to study different philosophical approaches to education, just as parents have their own philosophical views of how to raise their children. It is essential to have a conversation about educational philosophy between and among parents and educators alike. There are many considerations when striving to meet the unique needs of students with hearing loss. In this way, deaf education is different from typical education. We must remember, however, that students with hearing loss have the right to the same information and materials as hearing children. In this way, deaf education is the same as typical education.

Children are children before they are hearing, deaf, blind, sighted, using a wheelchair or from another country. The goal for educators is to make information and experiences equally accessible to each and every child whether through spoken language, a manual language, a tactile language, or a language at school that is different from home. Everyone has his/her own way of communicating.

For a brief discussion about educational best practices, please see Appendix 1.

Special Needs vs. Special Rights?

All children of all abilities have the right to an education that is nurturing, motivating, and relative to their daily lives. The words we use when addressing those rights can be powerful. The more we label children with 'needs,' the less capable they may be perceived by teachers, peers, and parents. Consider what happens in your mind if you "try on" the thought that children who are deaf/hh simply have additional rights than hearing people do. A child with 'special rights' may well be viewed differently and more capable than a child labeled with 'special needs.'

Deafness is Different

Families of deaf and hard of hearing (d/hh) students may exhibit different types of involvement based on their unique situations and skill sets. They may also be interested in specialized forms of support due to the 'disability'

itself. It is estimated that over ninety percent of children who are born with hearing loss have hearing parents (Mitchell & Karchmer, 2004). Being the hearing parents of a deaf or hard of hearing child may require individuals consider a wide spectrum of ideas they had no prior awareness of, for example, is deafness a 'medical condition' or a 'culture and community'? They may engage in the social and educational implications of the new culture to which their child's "label" has introduced them while also seeking medical/ technological interventions available for that child. The quality and quantity of information a family needs to form their own sense of what this experience means for them and their child comes from a variety of sources, and the need for ongoing support and resources continues throughout the child's educational and identity-discovering years. The cultural identity and belief system of a family influences and gives meaning to this process. Educationally, a family is often on a steep learning curve when discerning how to best help their child on numerous educational, social, and technological issues.

Parent Counseling and Training

It is essential that every program for deaf and hard-of-hearing children have a parent education component, listed under Related Services of the Individual's with Disabilities (IDEA) Act. Parent education must start as soon as the parent enrolls their child in the program or when an IFSP/IEP team determines that the child is eligible for services. Parent counseling and training may include, but is not limited to:

- Communication modes and approaches
- Program options
- Speech and language development
- Literacy Development
- Typical child development
- Meaningful communication access
- Parent rights and responsibilities
- The Deaf Child Bill of Rights/Communication Plan
- Information regarding special education laws
- Information about the ADA in higher education and the community
- Social/recreational opportunities for deaf and hard-of-hearing children and youth
- Opportunities for parents to meet and interact with deaf and hard-of-hearing adults. (CO Quality Standards, 2004)
- For families who include/use sign: Information about resources for further education, sign classes at various levels, informal 'silent' chats to improve skills, lists of signs for spelling words and other vocabulary, involve siblings
- For families who include/use auditory approaches: information and research about technology, proactive audiologic support, auditory language development tools and classes

The Colorado Department of Education has a manual regarding Parent Counseling and Training which can be downloaded at <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/download/pdf/rss-PCToct02.pdf>

School Programs can utilize existing organizations which provide workshops for families on these topics and others. In Colorado, the PEAK Parent Center (www.peakparent.org) provides support to families for parent involvement. Colorado Families for Hands & Voices also has a network of engaged parents who are part of the "Ambassador Program." (See Appendix 4) School districts can include parents in professional development opportunities, and also include training opportunities during back-to-school nights and other venues.



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Chapter 3

Practical Applications

“Extensive family participation involves families in aspects of the school’s life as varied as furniture construction and fundraising. In parent meetings, teachers discuss details of the child’s experience with parents, who respect the teachers’ expertise as fully as we do the doctor’s or lawyer’s. Teachers consider parents their full partners in fostering children’s potential, and parents respond by becoming deeply involved.” Lewin-Benham, 2006, page 3.

Educators: The most effective way to involve families in your school community is to begin by forming trusting relationships. Take the time to truly get to know the families whose children are in your program. The importance of open and honest communication is often overlooked. The more time you spend with the students and families, the more comfortable you will all feel. Remember, relationships are about give and take. Don’t approach a budding relationship as a teacher, but rather as another person. As soon as a hierarchy is formed, barriers go up. One thing you can count on is the idea that families are hungry for specific information about their child and his or her abilities, strengths and challenges in the classroom. One school principal asks teachers to send home one note about each child every month.

It is important to recognize that every family is different. Just like education must be individualized to a certain extent for each child, relationships with different families cannot all be alike. Every family will have different goals in mind for their child as well as their relationship with you as an educator. Listen to their requests and desires for the kind of relationship they would like and share yours. Discuss the importance of being partners with the family to maximize the potential for their child’s growth. While “nothing respects families more than schools’ ensuring that children thrive and develop competence and skills;” you will want to provide that in the context of recognizing that student as a whole person who comes from a family who live in a culture and community (Lewin-Benham, p.172.) Remind them of their right and responsibility to have a voice in their school. They know about their children’s deafness in a way that we as educators cannot know. Though there should be many people on the student’s team of advocates, remind families that you need them there to help connect the dots between education and deafness. Allow them to educate you about their child throughout the year, not just on the day of the IEP.

Helping Families to Stay Connected with Their Child's Education

'All About Me' books

A few weeks before school starts, consider mailing a blank 'All About Me' packet for the student to fill out, cover with photos, and color to bring into school the very first day. This will allow the student opportunity to describe him or herself to the new teacher and classmates. Encourage the child to talk about and explain their hearing loss to others in this book as an important self-advocacy skill for students of all ages. If you are inspired to take this one step further, send a completed one about you to introduce yourself to the students and families. You may even ask parents to make a packet about themselves, including things such as professions, languages spoken at home, culture, favorite vacations spots, hobbies, and how they might like to be involved in your classroom this year.

Daily Journals

Parents need to know what is going on in the classroom in order to support learning at home. The often cited mantra in deaf education is 'pre-teach/re-teach.' Parents can be a huge part of the process of filling in the gaps for d/hh students. Every day something important happens at school. This could include a birthday, a block structure as tall as the ceiling, a walk to the park, a completed project or a story from home. Whatever it may be, record it, snap a picture or two, and send it home in email form if you can. This provides a wonderful opportunity for parents to connect with their child's school day and a springboard for language and information exchange. Families could be prompted to move beyond "How was your day today? What did you do?" to "Tell me about the pretend job fair you had at school today. Do you think you will be a doctor when you grow up? Jimmy looked like he was having fun in those big fireman boots!"

Ideally the journal will reach families before they see their children arrive home. Or, if this is impossible, send it out by evening and encourage the children to look at it with the family together. The children can then describe the pictures of their day as well as a way to involve the parents in their child's school day.

Older students can benefit from this kind of information sharing as well. Upper elementary students could keep a notebook or a Blog with new words they have learned or idioms they don't recognize or what they covered in each class. Students might even track their progress on self advocacy skills, i.e. "I scheduled an interpreter for the play performance Friday night." Students will benefit from these journaling activities even if families don't get to discuss the current event analyzed in class each day, and perhaps the student will prompt the parents to look at the work as a way to celebrate a victory or help answer a question.

Classroom setup

If you want to involve parents in your educational community, their presence in your classroom is a must, especially for the younger ages. Make your classroom comfortable enough that families may want to sit and stay a while. Bring in cushy chairs or couches and pillows for younger kids and adult sized seating for older siblings and adults. When family visitors do come in, make them welcome, use the opportunity to teach greetings to the class, and invite the family member into the classes activity

Create a message board with a calendar to remind families about upcoming events. Leave a spare pen by the calendar for families to write in activities that they would like to suggest or even lead on specific days. Make a "family area" in your classroom where parents can send in things from home such as pictures and symbolic objects. Ask families to design family story panels with photos and text for this space. The children will be excited to have the 'presence' of their families so close.

Be aware that too much 'visual clutter' can be especially distracting to d/hh students who are already working hard to focus during the day. Be creative but judicious. Consider room dividers or screens that can be turned to display or hide as desired and may provide a "gallery effect" when set up.

Documentation panels

Parents will be drawn to your classroom when they recognize their children's work and photos near your room's entryway. A family who sees a display about their child's hearing loss and activities the class has done around the subject will be encouraged by your understanding of their child. It's such a relief for families when they know that you as an educator "get" their child. Provide texts that explain the photos and work.

Just as we try to motivate students to be involved by listening to their thoughts and words and creating projects and curriculum to draw them in, let's entice parents to want to be involved. Give parents reasons and access to work with you as partners.

Outreach

Make a point to involve families outside of school, you could coordinate a class visit to a parent's workplace related to an ongoing project at school or go to a local park and have a picnic where the students have done all the planning, food shopping, and preparation. Getting families of students together to make connections is a great way to help them feel comfortable and become more aware of what other parents are doing as educational partners.

Some schools even select and train "parent liaisons" who reach out to sometimes under-represented individuals like single parents, fathers, ethnic minorities, and families raising children with multiple health concerns.

Talk to students

Ask the students directly how they would like to invite their families into their school lives. Make them a partner in this process as well. Give them responsibility to include their families and brainstorm possibilities together. Get input from students about the successes and challenges they are having in communication access both at school and home. When a student is given information (i.e. use of an FM system) try to ensure that the student knows how to take that information back to his/her family.

Homework: Another perspective

A curricular intervention – interactive homework – requires children to discuss their class work and ideas with a family partner. Studies show that students assigned interactive homework had more involved parents, more positive attitudes, and higher achievement in math and science than did students in control groups with "regular" homework. Interactive homework assignments are designed to help parents talk to their children without thinking they must know how to "teach" the various subjects.

Beyond the IEP

Schools can support families by teaching them about their rights before each IEP in other ways than handing out the obligatory legal documentation. Consider connecting newer families with more experienced parents in the same district, hosting district wide special education events and facilitating introductions, hosting family friendly information on district websites and disseminating written information from advocacy groups and state resources such as Colorado Families for Hands & Voices, PEAK Parent Center, AG Bell and others (See Appendix 5). Parents can make a significant impact in program effectiveness through advocacy efforts within a district; wise educators partner with families to improve schools' ability to serve children.

What you can do as a parent to help your child be successful in school:

At home:

- Send your child to school every day, well rested and fed, with a positive comment about him/her.
- Take an active interest in your child's schooling and let your child know how much you care about learning. Find out what happened at school each day and how your child felt about it.

- Learn as much as you can about being an effective parent.
- Try not to let any negative experiences keep you from supporting and encouraging your child's education.
- Try to provide a variety of interesting reading materials in your home and spend time reading and writing with your child.
- Take your child to the local library and encourage reading for fun.
- Provide an area in your home where your child can keep her/his school things and, if possible, where she/he can do school work without continual interruption. Find ways to involve the family in homework or similar activities and remain supportive of the child's need to do homework.
- Show pride in your child's work and display it in special places in your home.
- Establish regular blocks of time when you expect your child to do school work.
- Follow up with your child and monitor homework and be consistent in your expectations.
- As appropriate, work with your child on school-related projects on a regular basis.
- Include your child in daily household tasks and make the connection between learning in school and application in daily life.

At school:

- Establish a positive relationship with your child's teacher early in the school year and maintain it by:
 - Meeting with the teacher and other school personnel regularly
 - Calling, writing notes or sending e-mails
- Never missing a parent-teacher conference and using the opportunity to share information with the teacher
- Make sure that communication flows two ways, both from school to home and from home to school
- Exercise your right and responsibility to voice your questions and concerns in constructive ways
- Recognize and acknowledge how difficult teachers' jobs can be
- Take every opportunity to let school personnel know when they are doing a good job
- Ask for ways you can work with your child at home to reinforce what the teacher has done in class.
- Volunteer to help on school projects, events, field trips, etc., if possible.
- Volunteer to help in the classroom, if possible.
- Become active in your child's school.
- Participate in school planning by serving on the school's Parent Advisory Committee.

In the community:

- Network with other parents in support of the school and the provision of quality education for your children.
- Encourage other community members to support effective education in your community through your place of worship, social club, business, employment, neighborhood, and city or state government.
- Hold high expectations for both your child and the school district.

Parent Involvement in Every School: A Training Manual for Parent Involvement, developed by the Title I Statewide School Support/Parental Involvement Initiative and the Texas PTA under contract with the Texas Education Agency.

Volunteer your time

Talk to your children and ask them how they would like to see you involved in their school community. Talk to your children's teachers and offer them ideas instead of simply stating that you are interested in helping. The more specific you are about your own interests, the more fun it will be for you. Educators often think about involving you on field trips as chaperones. If you have an idea about a field trip, suggest it. Do not, however, limit yourself to simply chaperoning. Ask to lead activities such as storytelling, leading a reading and writing group, or being an extra hand in gym class. Whatever it may be, get involved! Don't confine yourself to only the activities the teachers ask you to participate in. Have a voice and suggest your own. When appropriate, be involved in in-service opportunities to the class about the communication needs of your child.

Communicate with Other Parents

Most of you would love to volunteer at your children's schools but perhaps it seems like there is just not enough time in the day. What can you do from home that would help you stay connected besides using the daily journals? How about starting a parent email group or blog? Take the initiative to get a conversation going between and among parents. This could simply be a forum to get to know each other, to ask questions, or to share successes. Whatever it is, make it fit the needs of your community. Take this opportunity to share your perspective about deafness with other parents. Allow them to feel comfortable asking questions in a safe environment.

Share Your Feedback

Does the school feel welcoming to you? Are events held when you can attend, and held with enough notice and repetition of notices? Make it a goal to complete surveys, respond to questionnaires, and model collaboration for your watching child. If time permits, consider joining the school Accountability Committee – one of the most powerful forces in the school for parents. These committees consider curriculum changes, textbooks, budgets, and policies. Introduce yourself to school board members at school events (there is usually one in attendance at large events) and share your child's victories and your concerns.

Be appropriate, respectful and solution-oriented. Take responsibility for gathering information or resources if you see room for specific improvements. Proactively share what helps you child at home and any challenges you would appreciate follow-through and consistency on when your student is at school. Be a part of creating continuity for your child's day as s/he transitions from home to school.

Everyone is equal around a table

Families and educators alike must find time to eat a meal during our busy lives. Come together as a group at least once a school year to share food. Make it a potluck or a dessert. We have been amazed at how a simple meal can bring a group of strangers together to form a lasting community.

Do Your "Homework"

Think about following the U.S. Department of Education's Seven Good Practices for Families:-

1. Find the time to learn together with your children.
2. Commit yourself and your children to challenging standards--help children reach their full potential.
3. Limit television viewing to no more than two hours on school nights (and better yet, discuss what you are watching and make sure the captions are on!)
4. Read together. It's the starting point of all learning.
5. Encourage your children to take the tougher courses at school and check their homework every day.
6. Make sure your children go to school every day and support community efforts to keep children

safe and off the streets late at night.

7. Set a good example for your children, and talk directly to them about the dangers of drugs and alcohol and the values you want them to have.

Achieving the Goals: Goal 8 – Parental Involvement and Participation, 1997

Parent Involvement as a “Collective Force”

When teachers and school building administrators are feeling the pressure of time and energy constraints, parent involvement can often be seen as an extra ‘add –on.’ Creating a powerful parent involvement force in a school may take some extra energy in the beginning, but can ultimately be the very resource to help teachers in their day to day work. The practical solutions listed in this chapter to engage families can often be tasks taken on by a group of parents to implement.

Be Prepared for Power - (“Don’t worry; we’ll use our power for good, not evil”)

When parents come together, a common bond forms, and often the voice of families to have ownership in their child’s education or a program begins to emerge. It is the confident professional who has the ability to step back and let the parents lead or even participate in the development of where and how families will be involved in any given program. By setting the stage for involvement opportunities, you may be able to avoid a form of reactive advocacy (anger, frustration, and problem admiration) that sometimes diminishes a program’s motivation to bring families together.

By bringing a group of parents together who would be interested in serving the school, the following is a list of activities that parents themselves may be able to take on, plan and implement for program improvement. In addition to some of the practical solutions already mentioned in this chapter, here is another list of ideas that you could use a ‘force’ of parents to create.

Create a parent forum

Create an online tool in which parents can log on and post questions ranging from school issues, therapy, and equipment. Professionals would be included. This can be monitored by a parent to ensure professional conduct is adhered to. A school may already have this for the general population, and a link specific to the deaf/hh program could be added for specific communications for families whose children are in the d/hh program.

Create a peer mentoring program

Pair older kids who are d/hh with younger kids in a program to spend time together, eat lunch together once a month, to sit next to each other for assemblies, mentor reading once a week. Encourage a friendship that can follow through the years in a school program so that younger children get modeled leadership from older kids in the program. Create activities once a month during the day that get the d/hh kids from all grades together. It can be lunch outside, playground games, create a hallway art project. Utilize high school students to mentor d/hh elementary students

Creating Opportunities for Families to have Access to D/HH Adults

Create opportunities for families to be able to interact with deaf and hard of hearing adults through inviting participation of d/hh adults to school activities. The Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind has a Deaf/Hard of Hearing Connections program which can be accessed through www.csdb.org. For older students, mentoring opportunities should be considered to help connect students with d/hh adults who are out in the workforce.

Create a new student handbook

Consider having a new student handbook explaining d/hh vision statement of the school program, mission, expectations, problem solving techniques, class curriculum, expectations.



FAMILIES AND
EDUCATORS
WORKING
TOGETHER
IN SCHOOL
PROGRAMS

Chapter 4

Who Will Do What By When?

At any meeting, there is always that critical time in the proceedings when an idea has been discussed and is at risk of dying on the vine until someone says: "Who will do what by when?" Break down ideas into small, palatable pieces and get them assigned with a timeline. The old Chinese proverb about how do you eat an elephant -- one bite at a time -- holds true for any project. This act alone may move a system further than any other technique.

Whose Job Is It Anyway?

Consider the job of family engagement as everyone's job, but get the small, routine pieces assigned. Each classroom teacher can be responsible for regular contacts with families, but perhaps more elaborate events or projects might be best delegated to a small group of educators/parents who share a passion for connecting the home and school environment. Programs like the National Network of Partnership Schools help teams design a map of goal-directed activities to improve family and school engagement. Small tests of change are a great way to dip an institution's toe in the water of system improvement. For example, try scheduling something for families on every Second Tuesday of the month, and only that day, and observe if that makes a difference in family attendance. If students are consistently asked to speak at such an event, does that get more families involved? If we communicate by email and monthly newspaper, and a flyer home a few days before the event, does that make a difference? Keep records so that results can be evaluated.

It may be helpful for one staff member, program administrator or d/hh program coordinator, to be responsible for facilitating parent education.

The person in charge of coordinating parent education has the following responsibilities:

- Conduct an assessment of parents' needs/strengths
- Collaborate with parent leadership within the area or state to define responsibilities
- Provide informational programs to accommodate parents' priorities
- Organize a support group for parents
- Obtain and distribute written material
- Inform professionals and parents in the community about the identification and implications of hearing loss
- Develop a parent/community library or resource center

- Report research findings on how parent involvement can promote student success in school newsletters
- Provide information sheets to guide parents in helping students with a particular skill for example, information that explains how to help a young child with reading. (derived from pg. 65, CO Quality Standards for D/HH Students, 2004)

Parent activities may also be conducted in coordination with state, regional, and/or local parent groups. Utilizing a parent whose child is in the program to be 'on point' for helping to involve other families is also helpful (see appendix 4 for information about the "H&V Ambassador Program.")

Families like to be invited. Instead of relying on last year's design of the flyer or newsletter, try making a phone call to selected parents or being truly present for the drop off or pick up times of day when families can often be engaged. Remember that "involvement" takes many forms, from assisting a teacher, participating in celebrations, organizing committees, volunteering in the classroom, to chaperoning an event, and more. Anything is possible.

Having a positive attitude about family involvement is key. Do not think of it as extra work to add to your job. It is your job. Without family involvement, commitment, and interest, your job will be much more frustrating and much less productive. Take the time that is needed and try not to do everything at once. Communicate with other professionals as well as families and get their input. This is not a one-person job.

"Request something from everyone, even if only five respond. Keep trying. Don't stop the process! Be positive. Anything is a big achievement. It is better to begin on a Friday because weekends give families more time." Lewin-Benham, 2006, p.7.

Utilizing Other Parents as Models

Programs often strive to connect families to one another through a variety of methods. Often this is for emotional support or identity-building. One of the often overlooked purposes of parent-to-parent connections is the opportunity for families to see positively modeled behaviors of effective parent involvement and advocacy from their peers. In our organization at Hands & Voices, we have seen over and over again how parents who seemed unengaged, and were even considered by some to be 'deadbeat parents', began to step up to the plate when they met other parents who were taking responsibility for the education of their own children. This seems to be true across the spectrum of the different types and diversity of families. Asking families in your program who are actively involved to lead activities for other families can begin an infestation of involvement! This can happen in a variety of ways, but some tips for creating parent-to-parent opportunities that seem to 'gather the crowds' include:

- By parents for parents
- Offering different forums for support (phone, newsletter, workshops, meetings, informal, social etc.)
- Choosing topics 'where the rubber meets the road'
- Consistency

"Making the change from officers to a cooperative group was a risk...to support the school and maintain a high level of exchange with one another, then to share information with all the parents... but it worked!" Lewin-Benham, p.80.

Families Need to Learn Advocacy Strategies

Parents often become "advocates" in order to ensure that a child with special needs gets an appropriate education. They do not set out to be "adversaries". They bear the responsibility of being the constant in a child's life through Part C, Part B, (IDEA), neighborhood friends, grocery store encounters, summer camps and being subjected to a host of strong beliefs by others about modes of communication and methods of

teaching. Families want nothing more than to see their children succeed in life. Every year of academia counts -- early childhood education through PhD. It is only with the support, guidance, and advocacy of families and educators alike that these children will access what they need to succeed.

Developing advocacy skills may result in unintended benefits to parents

Colorado Families for Hands & Voices has helped families in Colorado develop advocacy skills for the past 15 years. We have noticed that, besides understanding IDEA, Colorado Regulations, and school district policies, parents may acquire a foundation for being meaningfully engaged that includes:

- believing in their rights and their role as 'equal partners'
- developing endurance; accepting their lifelong parenting role
- being principled and persistent
- having a sense of humor
- building relationships

In a Perfect World

In conclusion, we hope this booklet may serve as a foundation and stepping out point for school programs to initiate an effective program where families are meaningfully involved, and educators feel supported in the day to day work. We hope that parents can take this book to their school, offering their support and desire to create systemic educational improvement, so that all our children who are deaf and hard of hearing can succeed to their highest potential.

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Appendix 1

Thoughts on “Best Practices” in Education

By ‘best practices’ we mean providing a nurturing educational environment that “works” for a specific population of students, based on current research and information from our leaders in the field of both education and deaf education. Putting mode of communication aside, this is simply a conversation about education in general. Too often when we envision school we think of worksheets, textbooks, and individual subject periods. How we engage children with specific academic goals in mind is a huge topic to tackle. To illustrate, let’s take a peek into some hypothetical classrooms.

The first is an integrated (with both deaf and hearing children) preschool classroom. The children are interested in learning about road signs because “Alex” talks to some of his friends at school one morning about this funny red sign that he sees all over the place when his mom drives him to school. In morning circle time, Alex raises his hand to tell his friends about the sign. He describes it: red, lots of sides, white scribbles, big stick [metal pole], etc... He is wondering what it is. This conversation can go one of two ways. The teacher can think back to his lesson plan for the day and all of his hard work the night before copying worksheets and preparing materials for 15-minute center times broken up into math, science, and language. He can simply tell Alex that what he is seeing is a stop sign and end the discussion right then and there because the clock indicates that it is time for centers.

Another way to tackle this situation is by being flexible and creative in following the children’s interest. Nothing motivates children more than engaging them in activities that are exciting to their minds, not simply activities required by the state standards. Going “outside the box” can reap huge rewards “inside the box” of state standards and benchmarks. The teacher may still be required to form groups for math, science, and language centers but this does not have to include worksheets and rotating groups in 15-minute increments. Instead, the teacher could drop the centers idea and continue the conversation, including ideas from all the children. Alex draws a picture of what he remembers about the sign for his peers. He uses a red crayon and remembers that there are edges. He uses chalk in the middle of the red sign and scribbles letters. He uses glue to adhere a long stick at the bottom of the sign to signify the pole in the ground. This conversation could last for weeks. It may not seem to be relevant at first but if you look closely, Johnny is bringing up ideas such as shape, size, color, safety, along with new vocabulary words. This topic of discussion ties in more information than simply math, science, and language. They might have even gone on a ‘hunt’ to find stop signs around the school, taken a picture of them and written a story about why stop signs are important. The possibilities are endless.

The latter example shows Alex that his ideas are important and merit investigation and discussion while simultaneously touching upon math, science, and language skills. The former says to Johnny that what he has to say does not matter and only the teacher’s ideas are important, putting the children in the role of passive learning.

There is a common misconception that all children with hearing loss are so far behind their hearing peers that they benefit only from direct teaching strategies to obtain novel information. From an outside perspective, it might look like traditional deaf education is directed by educators’ opinions of what must be learned while simultaneously ‘opening’ the child’s mind, cramming as much ‘important’ information in his/her head as possible, closing it up, and expecting the child with hearing loss to simply spit it all back out. This may involve memorizing but does not necessarily equal understanding. In fact, the same could be said about regular education. As long as the children spit back the ‘important’ information, this implies that they

understand it and can apply it to another context. Problem solving skills develop from hands-on authentic experiences for all children, whether hearing or not. Of course these kinds of materials have their place in different contexts. By direct teaching strategies, we imply that information is given as opposed to explored, questioned, and understood. Think about the language-rich, hands on experience that children encounter when they not only physically explore and manipulate information, but also use questions posed by peers. Children with hearing loss opportunities for incidental learning, learning that happens 'on the fly,' without direct instruction. A teacher can facilitate conversations between and among peers during the 'stop sign hunt so that the d/hh student can this activity interactively as opposed to just being told a piece of information.

Educators: Take an example like this one as an opportunity to educate families about the importance of the steps taken in the second example. Explain your reasons for following the child's lead from an educational perspective and give examples of how a parent can do this at home. For example, a parent is putting dishes in the dishwasher after dinner and the child shows curiosity. Instead of finishing the job yourself, invite your child to join you and talk about the different names of cookware being put in the dishwasher. Engage in a conversation about this common household task, providing language rich vocabulary. Though this could be a mundane task for you, your child could benefit from an authentic learning experience and learn some new vocabulary. Later, encourage the children to talk about the dishwasher experience with another family member. This not only requires the child to remember novel vocabulary, but it also introduces past tense.

Giving parents examples from your daily classroom teaching strategies and brainstorming with them how they can use these techniques at home will allow consistency from school to home. This will also give parents the confidence to try new activities and to come back with questions or suggestions, which in turns lends itself to open communication between parents and educators.

APPENDIX 2

Principles of Family Involvement

Developed by the Federal Interagency Coordinating Council (FICC) in 2000

Demonstrate family independence and contribution.

- Develop a plan for identifying a diverse, representative group of families to participate.
- During and after meetings, specifically recognize the value of the family's participation.
- Recognize individual family strengths while respecting the different methods of coping and adjustment.
- Demonstrate how Federal programs support families to attend national conferences.

Provide family identified supports to assist the family's participation.

- Provide convenient meeting times and locations for family members.
- Compensate families for their time, expertise, and expenses.
- Clearly identify a staff person to be the primary contact person for reimbursement and other issues. Be sure she/he understands that timely reimbursement and contacts are essential.
- Develop provisions that ensure that parents are present to participate in policy related activities including direct staff support, stipends, travel expenses, and childcare.
- Identify these supports in RFP's, grants, and policy.
- Provide complete, appropriate information prior to meetings in a timely manner.

Match veteran parents with inexperienced family members to ensure that new members feel supported in their roles as advisors and have the opportunity to share their ideas.

Consider incorporating a "family leave" policy so family members can choose an inactive role but maintain their membership should family circumstances require some time off.

Recognize that some family members may require more and different kinds of support than others to participate in a meaningful way.

Encourage and facilitate family-to-family support and networking.

Provide formal orientation for families and provide information for involving them.

Provide orientation to both family members and staff about the issues, participants, and process.

Provide informational support for parents to be prepared to participate as equal partners on a "level playing field" with their professional counterparts.

Provide technical assistance, leadership mentoring, training, and other parent leadership teaming.

Ensure diversity among family members:

Honor the racial, ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic diversity of families.

Provide all materials in the families' preferred language.

Recruit broadly from the community and the population the program serves.

Bring in new families.

Adapt collaborative models to diverse cultures. Manage changing distribution of power and responsibility. Incorporate principles of collaboration into professional education.

Ensure broad representation among parent groups based upon the community(s) in question.

Be particularly careful to include members of traditionally underserved groups.

Avoid any appearance of tokenism.

Be ready to hear what families say:

Encourage and support family members to find their voice.

Ensure that parent perspectives are not considered a separate component of the policymaking process, but instead are infused throughout.

Always consider an individual parent's story as being valid.

Respect the passion families have for change. Celebrate the partnerships of working together for change.

Support staff in developing an understanding of the value of family participation.

Provide clear information about the goals of the board, task force, or committee and the role of individual members and the roles of family members.

Balance membership on committees between families and professionals.

Consider shared leadership - parent and professional co-chairs or teaming.

1 Early Childhood Corner. (Spring 2000) Principles of Family-Centered Care, [Newsline, The Federation for Children with Special Needs](#),

2 ibid

3 ibid

4 Epstein, M., Kutash, K., & Duchnowski, A. (Eds.) [Outcomes for Children and Youth with Behavioral and Emotional Disorders and Their Families](#). (pp. 233-234). Austin: PRO-ED. *Adapted from Essential Allies- Families as Advisors. Bethesda, MD: Institute for Family Centered Care*

Appendix 3

Colorado Quality Standards: Programs and Services for Children and Youth Who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Section Five - Parent, Family and Community Involvement

Outcome: Family and community members are active participants in the education process of children and youth who are deaf and hard of hearing.

Although special education is designed with the interest of students in mind, the path to its achievement is through comprehensive family and community support and involvement. With the support of a wide-ranging network of parents, families, deaf and hard of hearing adults, and business communities, the education of deaf and hard of hearing youth/children is enhanced.

Parent participation in education has long been recognized as a key component in improving student performance. Recognizing that the family is the constant in a child's life, while the service systems and personnel within those systems vary, is a key element in creating an effective education for deaf and hard of hearing children/youth. (NCFCC, 1990) It is essential to design an accessible program that is flexible, culturally competent, and responsive to family-identified needs. Programs should view families as a resource of knowledge, expertise, and caring regarding their children's developmental and educational experiences. When parents are supported, acquisition of further knowledge and skills that promote parent decision-making, choice, and self-determination occurs. Parents then become important partners in setting high expectations for their deaf or hard of hearing child.

The term families can mean a variety of individuals, such as parents, guardians, foster parents, grandparents, siblings, and extended family members. The term parent as used in this section is defined in the IDEA regulations, [34 CFR Sec. 300.20 and 303.19]. The term program refers to the regional system or local district/BOCES services and includes a continuum of placement options, e.g., home/early intervention, general education classrooms, center-based classrooms, state or charter schools for the deaf or hard of hearing.

Parent Training and Support

Standard 34

The program provides continuous opportunities for parents to acquire the necessary skills, especially in communication and language development, to support the implementation of their child/youth's IFSP/IEP.

The involvement of families as equal partners and active participants is critical to the success of children and youth who are deaf and hard of hearing as well as the success of the program. Parental involvement creates a reciprocal relationship between families and the program or school. The program/school provides training, counseling and/or support services to the family so that they can support their child/youth's attainment of their IFSP/IEP goals. The program incorporates a variety of methods and includes individuals to provide training for parents. Other parents, deaf and hard of hearing adults, program or school staff, and parent/consumer organizations are utilized. IDEA requires parents to be recognized as equal partners (34CFR300.345) and for parent counseling and training to be provided as a related service. [34 CFR300.13 (a)]; CDE, 2002).

The program for deaf and hard of hearing children/youth can provide important information and services to families to enhance the academic and social success of children/youth. In order for parents to function as equal partners, they need knowledge and support to make effective, informed decisions and to effectively participate in the IFSP/IEP process. The general goal of services to parents is to enable parents to become advocates to promote appropriate services for their own child. Parents are empowered to make informed decisions when they receive comprehensive, unbiased information from a variety of sources.

It is essential that every program for deaf and hard of hearing children/youth have a parent education component. Parent education must start as soon as the parent enrolls their child in the program or when an IFSP/IEP team determines that the child is eligible for services. For families with deaf or hard of hearing infants and toddlers, the services focus on parent involvement as it impacts the infant or young child who is birth – three years of age. Parent education includes, but is not be limited to:

- Communication modes and approaches
- Program options
- speech and language development
- Normal child development
- Meaningful communication access
- Parent rights and responsibilities
- The Deaf Child Bill of Rights/Communication Plan
- Information regarding special education laws
- Social/.recreational opportunities for deaf and hard of hearing children and youth
- Opportunities for parents to meet and interact with deaf and hard of hearing adults.

Communicating with families can be accomplished in a variety of ways such as: schoolwide (as well as regional and statewide) newsletters, long-range calendars, daily summaries of the child's day, routine phone calls, home visits, small groups, workshops for families, and professional trainings to which families are invited. Every aspect of the school climate is open, helpful and friendly. A parent room in the building may be set up to provide a place to meet, and for the dissemination of resources. Tours and orientations are provided for all new families. Each family's preferred communication style and home language should be accommodated in these activities.

It is helpful for one staff member to be assigned the responsibility of facilitating parent education. These duties may also be assumed by the program administrator or program coordinator. Parent activities may also be conducted in coordination with state, regional, and/or local parent groups. The person in charge of coordinating parent education has the following responsibilities:

- Conduct an assessment of parents' needs/strengths
- Collaborate with parent leadership within the area or state to define responsibilities
- Provide informational programs to accommodate parents' priorities
- Organize a support group for parents
- Obtain and distribute written material
- Inform professionals and parents in the community about the identification and implications of hearing loss
- Develop a parent/community library or resource center

Research studies have shown that children make greater progress and maintain these developmental and academic gains when parents provide language for their child at home rather than depending solely on the instruction the child receives in his or her educational program. Because parents play such a pivotal role in their child/youth's development, it is important for parents to use intervention strategies in daily interac-

tions with their children. Effective parent-child interactions and communication among all members of the family is a fundamental component to support each child's development and educational potential.

Language development must be a central part of all parent and community education. The deaf and hard of hearing children and youth provides ongoing, multilevel sign language instruction classes for families and community members. These classes should be given at times and in locations that are convenient for families and working parents. The classes should be free of charge and open to siblings and other family members. Sign language classes can also be offered available to the students in any school with a program for deaf and hard of hearing children and youth. At the secondary level, American Sign Language may also be offered for foreign language credit as part of the general education curriculum for all students. [Colorado HB 04-1037]. In addition, instruction can be offered to parents about the use of functional auditory skills to enhance speech development.

The program for deaf and hard of hearing children and youth provides information to parents and other community members regarding content and performance standards, grade-level expectations for achievement, and formal and informal assessments. This information includes (1) written information, available in all languages, regarding standards and expectations for all curriculum subject areas approved by the Colorado State Board of Education or district governing boards; and (2) workshops or programs convenient for parents and community members during which the standards, expectations, assessments, and accountability process used by the program and/or the district is discussed. Each teacher should be able to document the developmental or grade-level expectations, standards, and assessment results with the parents at each child's IFSP/IEP meeting or parent conference.

Parent Leadership and Participation in Program Development

Standard 35

The program actively promotes parents as equal partners encouraging strong collaboration between program/school staff and the development of parent leadership. This is reflected in every aspect of the program and includes a plan for involving parents in program development.

Families and other community members help the program to succeed. The program employs a wide range of strategies to ensure that parents are involved in – and are given clear opportunities to participate in decision-making, problem-solving, and advocacy resulting in an effective communication-driven education for all children and youth. Each program for deaf and hard of hearing children and youth should establish an advisory council consisting of parents, deaf and hard of hearing community members, representatives from deaf and hard of hearing organizations or agencies, members of the larger community, students who are deaf and hard of hearing, credentialed teachers, general educators, support staff from the deaf and hard of hearing program, and other persons as deemed appropriate.

Parent/professional collaboration is an essential component in creating a successful program. "Parents have been under-represented at the level where decisions are being made about programs and services for their children. But parents remain the consistent, long term case manager for their child; overseeing the programming and 'watch dogging' its quality." (Wright, 2001) In a program where parents and program staff work as partners, the program staff is positive, flexible, resourceful, and accepting. Parents and staff are viewed as equals. Parents and program staff make decisions together about program planning and design. Communication between program staff and parents is both formal and informal. It is frequent and personal. Programs should ensure that parent perspectives considered in the development of policies.

A parent advisory council can be an essential vehicle to promote parent involvement in program and school activities. This advisory council may participate in the design and implementation of staff development, in programmatic decisions, in the development of parent/community education programs and in the se-

lection and evaluation of the program administrator. Representatives from the advisory council and other parents or community members are encouraged to be involved in school-site governance teams, district committees, and special education community advisory committees.

Each program for deaf and hard of hearing children and youth should establish or utilize existing parent/community advocacy and support groups. These groups functions as a liaison among the parents, program or school staff, and the community and provide supports such as:

- A regular newsletter
- Advocacy at IFSP/IEP meetings
- Sponsoring recreational and social activities
- Raising funds for additional equipment or materials
- Providing recognition for teachers, staff, and students for outstanding achievement

The staff member responsible for parent education can work with the leadership of the parent/community support group to identify facilities and to provide interpreters and transportation.

Recommended duties/considerations for parent leadership may include:

- Representation on regional and statewide advisory boards, forums, and task forces
- Collaboration with medical, educational, and government agencies
- Provide convenient meeting times and locations for parent participation
- Compensate parent leaders for their time, expertise, and expenses.
- Ensure parents participate in leadership activities, which may include direct staff support, stipends, travel expenses, and childcare
- Determine capacity of volunteer parent leaders versus paid positions
- Identify sources within the state that could provide funding for parent participation (Consumer Involvement Fund, Colorado Department of Education, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, institutions of higher education, Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind)
- Identify paid parent leadership positions in grants and program budgets
- Utilize paid staff and volunteers from statewide or regional parent organizations
- Consider writing private and corporate grant proposals to pay for parent involvement
- Provide informational support for parents so parents can participate as equal partners with their professional counterparts
- Consider shared leadership – parent and professional co-chairs
- Provide clear information about the role of parent leaders on boards, task forces or committees
- Participation in quality improvement initiatives
- Parent leaders provide training to professionals at pre-service and in-service courses, workshops, and conferences.

Deaf/Hard of Hearing Adults & Community Involvement

Standard 36

The program involves the deaf and hard of hearing communities in program development and encourages strong collaboration between school staff, parents, and deaf and hard of hearing community members.

Community involvement provides integral support for children and youth. Deaf and hard of hearing community members can assist the program for deaf and hard of hearing children and youth by helping to design and implement a Deaf culture curriculum, providing deaf/hard of hearing role models, creating career/

vocational opportunities for deaf and hard of hearing children and youth, and by providing personnel who are proficient using the appropriate language. Businesses or agencies that employ or serve deaf and hard of hearing individuals can assist the deaf and hard of hearing program by forming a partnership with the school or program.

The program provides opportunities for families to become involved in the Deaf community.

Meaningful participation by deaf and hard of hearing adults may include, but is not limited to:

- Participating in the parent education program
- Reading to children
- Teaching sign language
- Speaking to parent groups
- Participating in field trips
- Explaining Deaf culture
- Participating in the regional advisory board

Children who are deaf and hard of hearing are frequently born to hearing parents. Some live in rural areas where there are no peers who are deaf or hard of hearing. It is important for these children and youth to have access to an adult who shares a child's experiences growing up with a hearing loss. Trained deaf and hard of hearing role models can provide information about their own hearing loss to children and youth who are deaf and hard of hearing. They can share their own personal experiences with students and families. The district or regional program needs a process to create access to deaf and hard of hearing adults.

Appendix 4

The Hands & Voices Ambassador Program



In Search of Colorado Parents: Ambassador Program 2010

In our ongoing efforts to reach more parents, Colorado Families for Hands & Voices is looking for parents willing to serve a one year commitment to be ambassadors in their geographical regions or for their center-based school programs.

We would ask less than 15 hours of your time during the year.

(No summer activities are required.) Parents who are chosen would attend a short orientation session by phone or in person. We are looking for willingness to share H&V events, newspapers, activities and contact information with other parents and school staff, bringing an H&V presence to school open houses or academic nights, keeping us up to date about events and issues in your school and district, and a brief summary of your activities twice during the school or calendar year.

For your efforts, **you will gain knowledge helpful to your own family**, increase your involvement in the fastest growing parent resource group in the nation, and receive reimbursement for any expenses. You will also be helping families around the state with information and resources. We are particularly interested in reaching the **"hard to find"** families: those new to our state or raising children with hearing loss identified after the age of three.

We hope to expand the Ambassador program to many school districts, rural areas and regions that have not historically been 'represented' through our current H&V Guide by your Side Regional Coordinators. Our work is all about the individual child in the classroom and what he or she needs to succeed. The Ambassador Program will help us reach more parents and professionals at the starting point – those involved with each particular child.

To request more information or send a letter of interest, contact Sara Kennedy at Sarak17@aol.com or call the H&V office at 303-492-6283

Note to Professionals who are serving children who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing

Please help distribute this information and to help us identify families who could serve as ambassadors! Our goal (as well as our mission statement at H&V!) is to work collaboratively with the professionals and educational agencies that serve our children.

THANKS!

Appendix 5

Resources on Family Involvement

Meaningful Family Involvement: A Short Guide for Professionals by Janet DesGeorges

http://www.handsandvoices.org/articles/parent_pro_collab/fam_inv_guide.html

Five Reasons Why Professionals Need to Listen to Parents

by Ruth Mathers, M.S., Certified Teacher of the Deaf

http://www.handsandvoices.org/articles/parent_pro_collab/V10-2_fivereasons.htm

Position Statement on Home-School Collaboration: Establishing Partnerships to Enhance Educational Outcomes

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Bethesda MD 20814
301-657-0270.

http://www.nasponline.org/about_nasp/pospaper_hsc.aspx

What Research Says About Parent Involvement in Children's Education, Michigan Department of Education

http://www.michigan.gov/documents/Final_Parent_Involvement_Fact_Sheet_14732_7.pdf

School-Parent Collaboration: A Labor of Love

By John Sommers-Flanagan, Ph.D. and Rita Sommers-Flanagan, Ph.D.

<http://www.schoolcounselor.org/content.asp?contentid=486>

50 Ways Parents Can Help Schools

<http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/envrnmnt/famncomm/pa11k20.htm>

Critical Issue: Supporting Ways Parents and Families Can Become Involved in Schools

<http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/envrnmnt/famncomm/pa100.htm>

Educational and Parental Involvement Organizations/Websites

U.S. Department of Education: www.ed.gov/ (includes Spanish Language website)

Boys Town Press: www.girlsandboystown.org

The Center for Divorce Education:
www.divorce-education.com

Colorado Families for Hands & Voices: national and state website:

www.handsandvoices.org,
www.cohandsandvoices.org

Communities in Schools:
www.cisnet.org/intro.html

Dana Center:
www.utdanacenter.org/

Family Frameworks:
www.parentalinvolvementnetwork.org

The Grandparent Foundation:
www.grandparenting.org

Harvard Family Research Project:
<http://www.hfrp.org/>

HIPPY: www.hippyusa.org

Hispanic Family Learning Institute: www.famlit.org

"I CARE" Positive Parenting Curriculum:
www.icarenow.com

Love and Logic: www.loveandlogic.com

Mega Skills – Dr. Dorothy Rich:
www.megaskillshsi.org

National Center for Fathering: www.unt.edu/cpe/

National Center for Family/Community Involvement
(SEDL): www.sedl.org/connections/

National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Educa-
tion: www.ncpie.org/

National Fatherhood Initiative:
www.fatherhood.org

National Parent Information Network:
www.npin.org/

National Parent Teacher Association: www.pta.org/

National Partnership for Women and Families:
www.nationalpartnership.org

Parent 2 Parent: www.p2p.org

Peak Parent: www.peakparent.org

Parents for Public Schools:
www.parents4publicschools.com/

Practical Parent Education:
www.practicalparent.org

Project Appleseed: www.projectappleseed.org

School, Family, and Community Partnerships – Dr.
Joyce Epstein: www.westviewpress.com

Search Institute: www.search-institute.org

Research on Partnership Program Development in Schools, Districts, Colleges, and Communities

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“Schools are not a substitute for families but rather...a system of connections and interaction among children, home and school...organized around children’s and families’ relationships with a school and its teachers.”

(Lewin-Benham, 2006, p.26)

If...

By Pamela Houk

If I can
ask my own questions,
try out my ideas,
experience what's around me,
share what I find;

If I have
plenty of time for my special pace,
a nourishing space,
things to transform;

If you'll be
my patient friend,
trusted guide,
fellow investigator,
partner in learning;

Then I will
explore the world,
discover my voice,
and tell you what I know in a hundred languages.