

BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION POLICY STATEMENT

PARENT & FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN THE BRIDGEPORT PUBLIC SCHOOLS

August 13, 2012

The Bridgeport Board of Education (BOE) strongly supports the connection between parents/families and school.

The BOE defines parents and families as mothers, fathers, step-parents, foster parents, guardians, grandparents, relatives, and primary and secondary caregivers.

The research on the connection between families and schools is overwhelmingly clear: when parents and families play a positive role in children's education, children do better in school. A high degree of parent and family engagement also leads to significant long-term benefits such as better school attendance, reduced dropout rates, decreased delinquency and lower pregnancy rates. Furthermore, the advantages of parent and family engagement are not confined to early childhood or the elementary level; there are strong benefits from engaging parents continuously throughout high school.

The BOE is guided by the belief that the education of children is a cooperative effort between parents and the school community. The BOE recognizes the need for all stakeholders (i.e. parents, school staff and community organizations) to work as knowledgeable and engaged partners.

The BOE requires the development, implementation, distribution and regular evaluation of a written parent and family engagement policy in each Bridgeport Public School Improvement Plan. This planning process will include administrators, parents, students, teachers and other key stakeholders.

Policy Vision:

Parents are their children's first and most important teachers. Research tells us that parent and family engagement makes a big difference in improving students' academic achievement and personal growth. Students do better in school and the schools improve when school districts do the following:

- welcome families and provide engagement opportunities
- communicate with families in a consistent and effective manner
- establish supportive and productive relationships between families and school staff

* See glossary at the end of this document for definitions

- improve the knowledge and skills of parents to advocate for children's education
- help parents understand how the school system works
- provide various ways for parents to access school-related information and school staff
- encourage family and school staff collaboration to improve and support what happens in the school and classroom

Improving parent and family engagement in the Bridgeport Public Schools (BPS) is the responsibility of parents, the BOE and BPS staff. In order to achieve this vision of effective parent and family engagement in the BPS, parents and families must have information and opportunities to improve their knowledge and skills as educators and leaders.

Specifically this policy encourages parents to be:

- an active presence in their children's school
- teachers of their children at home
- supporters and participants of school improvement
- advocates for their own and other children
- decision-makers and problem-solvers in school-related issues

Policy Elements:

1) Welcoming School Environment:

Parents' initial and on-going interactions with schools must be positive and welcoming. The below mentioned standards of welcoming behavior apply to all staff, including but not limited to front office staff, educators, bus drivers, security guards, custodians and cafeteria workers. All schools are required to:

- Post friendly signs welcoming visitors
- Provide them proper guidance once in the building
- Greet visitors and callers politely and promptly and supply them with information easily
- Maintain a welcoming atmosphere by all school staff

Schools establish teams of *Parent Ambassadors* made up of parent volunteers who serve in various roles:

- As an information source for parents (e.g. suggestions on improving parent-teacher relationships, serving as a "knowledge resource" to parents with students with special needs)
- As parent-to-parent engagement recruiters and facilitators
- As arrival and dismissal safety monitors (as part of the BOE's Safe Corridors initiative)
- As Family Resource Center helpers

* See glossary at the end of this document for definitions

2) Clear Expectations:

District-Wide Academic and Behavioral Expectations for All Grades:

- The BOE through the Superintendent of BPS defines and distributes district-wide academic and behavioral expectations for all grade levels. Along with the *Code of Conduct*, all school-administrators are required to ensure that all parents are given an informational document detailing the expected learning outcomes. It explains academic and behavioral expectations for their child's specific grade at the beginning of every school year.
- Curriculum and expectations of what is to be taught will be available on-line.
- Schools will provide grade level school compacts.

Parent-Teacher Agreements:

These agreements are designed to accomplish two major goals:

- Empower parents and engage them more fully with the education process by outlining clear expectations of how they will help their child succeed inside and outside the classroom
- Provide information on how teachers will keep parents informed on a quarterly basis about the status of their child's academic and behavioral progress – such as providing a progress report customized for ease of use by parents

Minimum Expectations of Teachers:

- Schedule of volunteer classroom hours, when the teacher invites assistance from parents and families
- Teachers' academic and behavioral expectations for students and behavior management strategy (e.g. classroom rules and **consequences***)
- Yearlong academic **syllabus*** and **curriculum*** plan distributed to parents at the beginning of each marking period.
- Specifics on how and when teachers prefer to communicate with parents
- Teachers should respond to parent's request for a meeting within two (2) school days
- Teacher should make every effort to keep PowerSchool® up-to-date

Minimum Expectations of Parents and Families:

- Parents are expected to be respectful, polite and patient with all school staff.
 - Profanity, threatening behavior and yelling is prohibited
- Parents with ideas, questions and concerns can initiate a one-on-one meeting with the teacher

* See glossary at the end of this document for definitions

- Parents should know and be adaptable to teacher's preferred method of communication, if possible
- Parents should let teachers know the parent's preferred method of communication
- Parents are responsible for updating their contact information with the school and teacher for emergency notification purposes (e.g. phone numbers, email addresses, home address etc.)
- Parents should respond to teacher's request for a meeting within two (2) school days
- Parents should attempt to use PowerSchool® as a way to monitor their child's performance

3) **Robust Communication:**

Parent Survey:

- Schools relay and collect information from parents via District surveys at least twice per academic year.
 - o Beginning of the year survey identifies the primary language of individual families, the talents, skills, resources and time parents can share with school and parents' preferred methods of communication
 - o Mid-year survey is an evaluation of **school climate*** and parent engagement opportunities (e.g. potential workshops for parents)
 - o Survey should be designed by each school's School Governance Council (SGC)
 - o Data should be reviewed, shared with parents and used accordingly by the School Governance Council (SGC)

Language Services:

- Schools should make every effort to communicate with families in the parent's primary language for oral and written communications:
 - o Language-specific translators (either school staff or parent) are made available to parents and families who request them
 - o All district websites are enabled with a translation application (e.g. Google Translate ©)

Methods of Communication:

- Schools will make every effort to communicate with parents through various and emerging methods of communication (text, email, phoneblast, letter, social media, etc.)

* See glossary at the end of this document for definitions

4) Effective Access:

The BOE through the Superintendent of BPS is required to communicate the resources available to parents and provide parents with the knowledge and skills to *access* these resources (including workshops and tutorials).

PowerSchool®:

This online tool allows parents to:

- Easily monitor their child's grades, class work and assignments
- Track student attendance
- Alert parents when the child's grades drop below a specified level

Parent Engagement Calendar and Tracker:

- The BOE adopts district-wide implementation of a parent engagement tracking system (e.g. www.parentengagementtracker.com) as a way to provide parents with an up-to-date calendar of school volunteer and engagement opportunities
- The tracker also serves as an accountability tool for parents, administrators and Home-School Coordinators

Superintendent Forum:

The goal of the Forum is to provide parents with a more direct dialogue with the superintendent on a variety of school district issues.

- Two parents from every school are selected by that school's School Governance Council to meet with the Superintendent at least four times a year (once every marking period).
 - o Parents set the agenda for the Forum
 - o Examples of Forum topics may include:
 - School-to-Home and Home-to-School Communication
 - Best practices from schools across the district
 - Parent engagement
 - School climate
 - Academic performance
- Minutes from Forums are posted on the Bridgeport Public School website.

* See glossary at the end of this document for definitions

Parent Advisory Council (PAC)

The BOE through the Superintendent of BPS is required to facilitate and ensure the creation of a functional District Parent Advisory Council (DPAC), one PAC for each K-8 school, and a Parent, Teacher and Student Organization (PTSO) for each high school.

- The role of PAC and PTSO is “to improve parent involvement through a system of activities that work in cooperation with school personnel to increase and enhance educational opportunities for children both in school and at home” (PAC Bylaws, 2010).
- All school PACs and PTSOs are managed under the District PAC and operate under its bylaws
- Members of school PACs and PTSOs includes BPS parents, according to District PAC governing bylaws
- District and school administration are required to provide:
 - o a functional and accessible room for PAC/PTSO meetings at the local school
 - o a useful meeting space at the Parent Center for District Executive PAC

School Governance Councils

The BOE through the Superintendent of BPS is required to facilitate and ensure the creation of functional School Governance Councils (SGC) according to State law—one Council at each school.

The composition of the SGC should be consistent with State law:

- 7 parents or guardians elected by the parents or guardians of students attending the school
- 5 teachers at the school elected by teachers of the school
- 2 community leaders within the school district elected by the parent or guardian members and teacher members of the Council
- The school principal or designee named by the principal
- For high schools, 2 student members elected by the school’s student body

The current school PAC/PTSO president should be encouraged to run for a seat on the SGC.

The responsibilities of the SGC parent members include:

- Attending meetings, trainings and, in an advisory role, participating in discussions pertaining to the overall health of the school, including but not limited to:
 - o School-based budgets
 - o Interviewing process for building-level administrators

* See glossary at the end of this document for definitions

- Reviewing school education plans and school data
- Developing an Action Plan designed to meet the goals of the school's SEP to more fully engage parents/families in support of student success

5) Parent Skills and Knowledge:

Parent Center:

The Parent Center is a bridge between home, school and community and a hub for parents to visit and explore resources for Adult Education and personal growth as a parent and community member.

The Parent Center serves as a citywide resource for parents connecting them to various agencies in Bridgeport that provide parenting skills, life skills and enrichment opportunities. The Center provides monthly workshops, training and academic initiatives. It distributes this information to Home-School Coordinators and school-based Family Resource Centers to reach parents across the district.

The Parent Center serves as a home base for the District PAC and provides support for all PAC initiatives and programs.

Parent Problem Solving Groups:

Parent Problem Solving Groups may be created at the school- and district-level. The Parent Center will serve as facilitator to these groups. Groups consist of parents that problem-solve around a particular issue affecting their school or the school district as a whole. Parents in these groups identify a problem, brainstorm causes and solutions and develop and implement an action plan to solve that problem. After going through this process, the parents then monitor and evaluate their implemented solution.

Family Resource Centers:

A Family Resource Center or Parent Room exists at every school where space permits and provides a broad range of free instruction and educational support to help families reach their goals:

- Development of the parent's role as teacher.
- Infant-toddler classes to stimulate the children's brain growth.
- Parenting workshops that teach the milestones of child development and work on skills and strategies to help their children develop academically, socially and emotionally.
- Improvement of parents' literacy, math and technology skills

* See glossary at the end of this document for definitions

6) **Family-to-School Relationships**

Parent Service Hours

Successful schools with high levels of parent engagement often invite parents to perform a minimum number of service hours. All schools are required to provide a list of service opportunities for every marking period.

- School stakeholders (parents, teachers and administrators) will determine the activities appropriate for service hours at their particular school.

All families are strongly encouraged to participate in at least ten (10) hours of school and/or district related activities such as:

- BOE meetings, school PAC/PTSO meetings and District PAC sessions
- Parent workshops/programs (at the Parent Center or at community agencies)
- Committees (e.g. School Governance Council, band support, PAC events)
- Foreign language translation help
- Volunteering in classrooms, cafeteria, playground, etc.

Home-School Coordinators:

- A Home-School Coordinator is employed in every school and serves in the following capacities:
 - o Supporting the implementation of the Bridgeport Public Schools' parent engagement policy
 - o Acting as a resource and information source for their school community's parents
 - o Serving as a leader and facilitator of parent outreach efforts throughout the school community in conjunction with the school PAC
 - o Strengthening parent presence by recruiting school volunteers for leadership positions and other service opportunities.
 - o Functioning as an organizer, tracker and event planner for parent engagement opportunities in conjunction with the school PAC

7) **Reporting**

The superintendent or his designee will report to the BOE twice yearly the status of the Parent & Family Engagement Policy implementation and the status of parent engagement in the District.

* See glossary at the end of this document for definitions

About the Policy:

This policy was developed by a city-wide team of Bridgeport Public School parents with the support of Excel Bridgeport (www.excelbridgeport.org) and PAC leadership. The team spent several months engaged in a **problem-solving process** seeking to identify and address the biggest challenges to parent engagement in the Bridgeport Public Schools. This policy is reflective of parents' experiences in the Bridgeport Public Schools and the perceived needs in the district and parent community.

Appendix:

Frequently Used Abbreviations:

BOE: Board of Education

BPS: Bridgeport Public Schools

PAC: Parent Advisory Council

PTSO: Parent Teacher Student Organization

ELL: English Language Learner

SPED: Special Education

SGC: School Governance Council

HSC: Home-School Coordinator

FRC: Family Resource Center

GED: General Education Diploma

ESL: English as a Second Language

SEP: School Education Plan

Glossary:

District/District-wide: Refers to the city-wide system of schools; in other words, *all* schools in the Bridgeport Public School system. "District" also refers to administrators of the Bridgeport Public Schools who do not work directly in one of the schools (e.g. the superintendent and assistant directors).

* See glossary at the end of this document for definitions

Consequences: With regard to classroom behavior, consequences can be positive or negative outcomes of a child's actions and behavior.

Syllabus: An outline of the topics to be taught and learned within a period of time. For example, a 7th grade U.S. History syllabus may outline the different U.S. History topics (e.g. Pilgrims, Revolutionary War, Civil Rights Movement, etc.) students will learn about over the course of the school year.

Curriculum: A more detailed plan of study explaining the different parts of the topic to be taught and learned. For example (using the example above), a more detailed plan about how and what parts of the Civil Rights Movement students will learn about.

School Climate: The feelings and attitudes that result from a school's environment. An example of a positive school climate is a school that feels friendly, inviting and supportive.