

Chapter 15

PARENT AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Parent and Community Involvement

Parent and community involvement is essential to a successful comprehensive school health program. According to the Texas Education Association/Texas PTA's Manual of Parent Involvement, "Every research study on parent involvement conducted in the past 20 years has shown the same result: Parent involvement increases student achievement and self-esteem."¹ By integrating school, parent, and community resources and support, school health programs can enhance the health and academic success of students. This chapter includes suggestions for enhancing parent and community involvement with schools and school health programs.

Family and Community Involvement in Schools

Partnerships among schools, families, community groups, and individuals should be designed to share and maximize resources and expertise in addressing the healthy development of children, youth and their families.² The family, the school and the community each have valuable resources that may be called upon to support schools and school health. Within the community, many organizations exist that influence the health, safety, and learning potential of students.³ The essential functions of family and community involvement in school health include:

- Providing time, expertise, and resources;
- Supporting student involvement in activities that support health;
- Ensuring that students and their families receive needed health services;
- Planning jointly to develop relevant and appropriate messages and services;
- Delivering clear, consistent messages that support health, including high but attainable expectations, and offering appropriate role modeling; and
- Sharing facilities and encouraging participation by all relevant individuals and groups.⁴

Involving Parents

Most parents want to be intimately involved in their child's education and health. This involvement not only enhances the health, self-esteem, and academic potential of the child, but also empowers the parents to be more responsible for the health and education of their child. Regular communication with parents and active recruitment is key to soliciting their involvement. When parents feel comfortable with the school and the school health system, they are more likely to participate.⁵ The Health Committee of the Virginia Congress of Parents and Teachers developed the following list of ways that parents might become involved in the coordinated school health program:

1. Health Services.

- Parents with training in universal precautions can be volunteers for school-based health services.
- Parents can walk students to appointments.
- Parents can assist staff members with non-confidential paperwork.
- A school nurse (with assistance from the local PTA) can plan and conduct many types of training sessions for parents, including first-aid, disease prevention and control, and injury prevention.
- Parents can become certified vision/hearing screeners or spinal assessors.

2. Health Education.

- Parents can talk with the school administration about mailing the campus newsletter to parents.
- Parents can volunteer to have a regular column on student and family health in the newsletter.
- Parents can ask teachers to require their students to share articles on health with their parents. (This may meet the challenge of possible parent illiteracy.)
- Parents can hold parent education workshops for other parents. In doing so, parents should be included in the planning and implementation of the workshops.

- Parents can prepare bulletin boards in the nurse’s office with health tips.
- Parents can help provide incentives to encourage attendance at the workshops (e.g., providing transportation to the workshops, child-care during the workshops, and food/refreshments for the participants).
- Parents can help with publicizing the events (e.g., school newsletters, PTA newsletters, menus, phone tree, television, radio, through homeroom/health classes, use of case workers).
- Parents can teach or speak about health related careers (e.g., physician, nurse, dentist, etc.).

3. Physical Education.

- Parents (through the local PTA) can help sponsor awards for participation in sports that also encourage academic excellence (for males and females). Parents may want to sponsor “most improved” awards.
- Parents can work with the school’s physical education department to plan and/or implement field days and “athletic” festivals, class/grade/school dance performances, or events.
- Parents can volunteer with the school’s athletic department to work at track meets and swim (or other) classes.

4. School Nutrition Services.

- Parents can work with the school personnel to establish a parent-student school nutrition committee (or subcommittee to the local school health advisory board) to help the nutrition services staff promote good nutrition practices.
- Parents can work with the school administration to invite other parents to eat at school with their children at least twice a year.
- Parents could help the school establish a “lunch buddy” program where parents (or other professionals, community members, or other role models) could eat lunch on a regular basis (once or twice

a month) with assigned students. These role models may give support and encouragement to students on a one-to-one basis.

5. Counseling and Psychological Services.

- In most cases, parents should be involved in any counseling and psychological services provided to their children (unless it is determined that it is not in the best interest of the student).
- Parents may assist school staff members in non-confidential paper work.
- Parents may walk students to appointments.
- Parents and school staff members may collaborate to plan and implement training sessions for other parents.

6. Healthy School Environment.

- The local PTA, or other parent group, can work with the school administration to conduct an evaluation of the school environment (grounds, ventilation, handicap accesses, crosswalks, safety features, and so forth).
- Parents can develop a school-sponsored project to improve some aspect of the school's environment. However, local PTAs are discouraged from raising large sums of money for such projects. An alternative is to develop a business-PTA partnership to fund the project and/or arrange for volunteer labor. Parents can work with the local school board to fund projects to improve the school grounds and facilities. It is also important to be aware of tax laws related to these projects.

7. Staff Wellness Programs.

- Parents can work with school personnel to establish school staff wellness programs.
- Parents can volunteer to assist in sponsoring staff health screenings.

- Parents can work with a school committee to plan and implement parent/staff/student wellness nights.
- Parents can sponsor incentives for ongoing parent/staff health improvement programs (e.g., smoking cessation, weight control, exercise programs, and so forth).⁶

School Health Advisory Committees⁷

A local school health advisory committee should promote and encourage links between the school and the community. It should strive for a diverse and sizable representation to allow for participation by a greater number of people and enable new voices to be heard. The membership should be open to volunteers interested in school health issues such as local and regional health and human service providers, state agencies, primary care providers, business, religious, and service organizations, the police department, and other local officials.

The whole committee should meet as necessary, but at a minimum, on a quarterly basis at a time of day or evening and at a location that is most convenient for committee members. Meeting agendas should be planned and distributed in advance. It may be important to prepare participants ahead of time in order for them to feel comfortable and encourage their participation during meetings. Parents who have not had experience serving on committees or whose first language is not English may wish to be contacted and briefed by the school prior to attending their first advisory committee meeting.

The committee may organize small work groups that are project-specific or establish standing subcommittees in such areas as violence prevention, health policies, or health curriculum. For example, a working group including a school nurse, a teacher, and an administrator, may work on projects in consultation with a larger committee. A committee's collective knowledge, expertise, and influence can be a powerful force on behalf of the comprehensive school health program; it can identify health and social problems related to the community's youth, develop viable solutions, and identify key resources.

Texas School Health Advisory Committee

The Texas School Health Advisory committee has been established to provide assistance to the Texas Board of Health and the Texas Department of Health (TDH) to establish a leadership role for TDH in the support for and delivery of school health services. The goal of the Texas School Health Advisory Committee is for all Texas children to reach their full personal, health, and academic potential.⁸

History of the Committee. In January 1997 the Texas State Board of Health (BOH) and the Board of Nurse Examiners met to discuss concerns relating to the quality of health care provided to children in Texas schools. As a result of this discussion, the BOH charged the Texas Department of Health School Health Program to form a diverse workgroup to explore issues related to school health and to make recommendations. In April 1999 the BOH adopted rules to establish the School Health Advisory Committee to continue the efforts of that workgroup on a long-term and ongoing basis. In May 2000, the BOH selected sixteen applicants to serve as the initial members of this committee.⁹

Membership of the Committee:

Two Physicians Providing Health Services to School-Aged Children:

- Alma Golden, MD, UTMB Healthcare Systems
- Ann Sims, MD, Advocacy Center of Waco

Two Registered Nurses or Physician Assistants Providing School Health Services:

- Gustavo Alonso Bendek, PA, Slaton Primary Care Clinic
- Catherine Harris, RN, Midland I.S.D.

Six Consumer Members including Parents of School-Aged Children and at Least 1 Parent of a Special Needs Child:

- Selenda Cumby, parent of school-aged children
- Ramon Orduno, parent of child with special needs
- Kathi Seay, parent of school-aged children
- Danica Shanahan, parent of school-aged children
- Michelle Smith, parent of school-aged children

- Linda Thune, TASK / parent of children w/ special needs

Two School Administrators:

- Eliu Michael Hinojosa, Superintendent, Hays CISD
- Charles Meisgeier, Special Ed. & Psych. Services, Houston ISD

Four Members Representing Organizations and/or Agencies Involved With Health of School Children:

- Tommy Fleming, Texas Education Agency
- Jenni Jennings, Dallas Public Schools
- Ruth Stewart, RN, Texas Nurses Association
- Jane Tustin, RN, National Association of School Nurses¹⁰

Parent Teacher Organizations

Parents and the community may also become involved in the school health program through organizations such as PTA or PTO. PTA refers to the National Parent Teacher Association. It is a non-profit organization of parents, educators, students, and other community members. With nearly 6.5 million members, it is the largest volunteer child advocacy organization in the U.S.¹¹

The mission of the PTA is: “To support and speak on behalf of children and youth in the schools, in the community, and before governmental bodies and other organizations that make decisions affecting children; to assist parents in developing the skills they need to raise and protect their children; and to encourage parent and public involvement in the public schools of this nation.”¹²

While the PTA is a national organization, local units of the PTA meet at schools and often join together to form councils. Councils are grouped into 18 districts in Texas. Each has a president that is governed by the Texas PTA Board of Directors. “PTAs meet together, study problems, support teachers, volunteer in schools, attend workshops on parenting, and become informed on issues regarding children and youth. As a result, PTA members become better parents, teachers, and citizens.”¹³

PTO (Parent Teacher Organization) is a campus-level organization of parents, teachers, and community members that deal with issues confined to that school. There is no state or national PTO and there are no national resources.¹⁴

The National PTA Headquarters can be contacted at the following:

National PTA Headquarters

330 N. Wabash Avenue, Suite 2100

Chicago, Illinois 60611

Phone: (800) 307-4782

Fax: (312) 670-6783

Email: info@pta.org

Patricia Yoxall, Director of Public Relations

The National PTA has adopted the following voluntary guidelines for schools to use to promote awareness of and meaningful parent and community involvement in school programs. They may be adapted to encourage involvement in school health programs:

- I. Communicating—Communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful.
- II. Parenting—Parenting skills are promoted and supported.
- III. Student Learning—Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.
- IV. Volunteering—Parents are welcome in the school and their support and assistance are sought.
- V. School Decision Making and Advocacy—Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families.
- VI. Collaborating with Community—Community resources are used to strengthen families and student learning.¹⁵

Community Regulatory Organizations

There are several statewide organizations in Texas that partner with the educational system to coordinate, regulate, and support aspects of school health programs. These

organizations and the services they provide are important components of the community's involvement with school health and the promotion of student achievement.

Texas Department of Health

The Texas Department of Health (TDH) plays an integral role in the implementation of school health programs in Texas. TDH's School Health Program:

Provides leadership and support to communities in their efforts to meet the health services and health education needs of children in a school setting by supporting comprehensive school health programming; providing leadership in policy development and advocacy in school nursing issues; ensuring high quality services in TDH-funded school health projects and programs through the provision of technical assistance and quality assurance activities; and providing support to communities desiring to initiate school-based health services.¹⁶

Other school health-related services provided by TDH include:

- School Based Health Center Initiative.
- Texas Comprehensive School Health Network Education Services Centers.
- Awards for Excellence in Texas School Health.
- Spinal Screening Program.
- Support for Traditional School Nurse Services.
- Texas School Health Advisory Committee.
- Providing educational information to schools and to the public.

In addition, TDH collaborates with other organizations. For example, in 1998 TDH collaborated with the Board of Nurse Examiners to create a School Health Task Force to examine school health in Texas and to make recommendations for future school-health initiatives.¹⁷

Texas Association of School Boards

The Texas Association of School Boards (TASB) is a voluntary, statewide, not-for-profit organization that serves and represents Texas school districts.

According to their website:

TASB's membership includes all 1,045 Texas school districts, all 20 regional education service centers, 45 junior colleges, 45 tax appraisal districts, and 147 educational cooperatives. The Association represents the largest group of publicly elected officials in the state (more than 7,000 school board members) who preside over combined expenditures of more than \$18 billion annually, employ more than 400,000 people, and serve over 3.5 million Texas students.¹⁸

In addition:

TASB's official positions on legislative and regulatory matters are incorporated into the Association's biennial Legislative Program developed through TASB's Grassroots Advocacy Process and resolutions adopted annually by the Association's Delegate Assembly. Although TASB's specific stance on education issues may change over time, the Association remains dedicated to the preservation of local control of public education.¹⁹

Texas Education Agency

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) is a branch of state government that works with the Texas public elementary and secondary school system. It is governed by the State Board of Education (SBOE). Local Education Agencies (LEAs) are located throughout the state to assist local school districts. TEA's Parent Involvement and Community Empowerment Unit serves to advise local education service centers and school districts in their efforts to enhance parent and community involvement in schools. TEA's *Parent Involvement Manual* was created through a joint project between TEA and the Texas PTA. It is designed to be used by parents, educators, and community volunteers interested in strengthening the ties between families, schools, and communities to promote academic success. It includes handouts, transparencies, surveys, and an extensive reference appendix that can be used to train individuals and groups.²⁰

The initiative has six focus areas:

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- Coordination of state, regional, and local initiatives that help young children enter school ready to learn, including developmentally appropriate programs for children from birth through pre-kindergarten;
 - Assistance to education service centers, districts, and campuses in their efforts to enhance parent and family involvement in education;
 - Encouragement of voluntary parenting education programs;
 - Promotion of adult and family literacy, which contributes to the overall improvement of educational and workplace skills for children and families;
 - Planning with other state agencies and the business community to foster successful school-to-work transitions; and
 - Identification of policies that enable local communities to coordinate resources that serve the needs of students and families.²¹

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²¹ Texas Association of School Boards. (July 25, 2001). [On-line]. Available: www.tasb.org