



A Snapshot of The Indiana Partnerships Center

*Lessons and innovative practices for
engaging parents in the world of education*

**Showcased in the U.S. Department of Education's
*Engaging Parents in Education:
Lessons From Five Parental Information And Resource Centers***

Innovations in Education

The Indiana Partnerships Center's Belief Statements

- All parents want their children to succeed.
- All parents have strengths and are important.
- All parents can learn how to help their children in school.
- All decisions about involving parents should be made in conjunction with parents.
- Schools improve when they partner with parents and the community.

The five Parental Information Resource Centers highlighted in the full publication were chosen based on the range and quality of their practices, combined with the organizations' locations and demographics of their target populations and the quality of their collaborations with other parent involvement organizations or education agencies.

Excerpts about The Indiana Partnerships Center were reprinted with permission from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Innovation and Improvement, *Engaging Parents in Education: Lessons From Five Parental Information And Resource Centers*, Washington, D.C., 2007.

A Message from The Indiana Partnerships Center

On behalf of our staff, volunteers, and the parents, students, and schools we serve, I am pleased and proud to present:

A Snapshot of The Indiana Partnerships Center

Lessons and innovative practices for engaging parents in the world of education

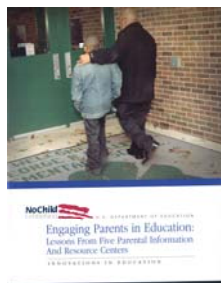
Filled with excerpts from the U.S. Department of Education's publication, *Engaging Parents in Education: Lessons From Five Parental Information and Resource Centers*, this brief overview will provide you with highlights of The Indiana Partnerships Center's work and progress here in Indianapolis and throughout Indiana.

The Indiana Partnerships Center is one of only five Parental Information Resource Centers (PIRC) in the country to be featured in this national publication. While we consider this selection quite an honor, we recognize the opportunity it affords us to inform education professionals about the innovative work we are doing on behalf of parents, students, and school systems.

The Indiana Partnerships Center is proud to lead the charge in engaging parents in their children's education to positively impact student achievement. And isn't that what we all want...for our children – tomorrow's leaders – to achieve their goals and dreams in life? Parents are a big part of the picture, and The Indiana Partnerships Center stands ready to show you how to put the pieces together.

Thank you for your interest in our mission, programs, and progress. We hope you find the tips and resources provided in this snapshot to be helpful. We encourage you to adapt them as you see fit to meet your own school or organization's needs.

If you would like a free copy of the U.S. DOE's complete publication, or more information about The Indiana Partnerships Center and how you can work with us, please call us at 317-205-2595 or toll-free at 866-391-1039. We look forward to hearing from you.



*Sincerely,
Jackie Garvey*

Establishment of Parental Information and Resource Centers (PIRC)

Over the past three decades, education research has established a direct correlation between increased parent involvement and increased student achievement.

PIRCs were established by Congress under the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, with the first 28 PIRCs funded by the U.S. Department of Education in 1995. Since that time, the PIRC's role has expanded to include helping education agencies implement the No Child Left Behind (NCLB)'s parent involvement mandates.

Key PIRC roles include:

- providing leadership, technical assistance and support in the implementation of successful and effective parent involvement policies, programs and activities intended to improve student achievement
- strengthening partnerships among parents, teachers, principals, administrators, and other school personnel in meeting the education needs of children
- developing and strengthening the relationship between parents and their children's schools
- providing a comprehensive approach to improving student learning through coordination and integration of federal, state, and local services and programs.

Established in 1998, The Indiana Partnerships Center is a stand-alone program with seven full-time employees and four part-time employees. The Indiana Partnerships Center's focus:

- establishing parent centers
- helping schools assess their family-friendliness
- providing training and support for parent liaisons
- training parent leaders
- establishing and supporting father volunteer groups.

PART I: PIRC's Role in Building Understanding of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Other Education-related Issues

Understanding the Audience

Understanding the target audience is fundamental to communicating information. The Indiana Partnerships Center understands this concept and works with district level education agencies in order to access staff (including teachers) for training purposes and distribution of materials (e.g. NCLB guides) to these educators and, through them, to parents.

Recognizing the need to provide materials in both English and Spanish, The Indiana Partnerships Center:

- offers all key parent materials and services in both languages
- includes a Spanish language interface on its Web site that is accessed simply by clicking on the "Español" link which includes a page of resources specifically geared to families with limited English proficiency.

Tips for Understanding the Audience

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

Ensure User-Friendly Language and Format

Focused on imparting user-friendly information to parents about NCLB and P.L. 221, The Indiana Partnerships Center:

- created and distributes *A Parent's Guide to Understanding NCLB & P.L. 221*. This colorful, eight-page guide utilizes simple, appealing graphics to introduce the laws and define key terms. Most of the information is outlined in a chart format, organized by key concepts covered by the laws, including academic goals, teacher qualifications, student assessment, accountability, and school safety.

Columns provided include "NCLB," "P.L. 221," "What it means to parents," and "Where to find more information." Like the rest of The Indiana Partnerships Center's information resources, this helpful guide is provided in both English and Spanish. It is available at www.fscp.org or by calling 317-205-2595.

Tips for making education-related information available and understandable

- Resist reinventing the wheel – check for existing publications and tools to distribute.
- Create reader-friendly NCLB materials that are short, concise, clearly written, and well designed.
- Ask representative parents to review draft materials for reader friendliness before the materials are produced.
- Create informational DVDs for group sessions and parents who do not read.
- Create workshops, guidance sessions and Web sites to help parents understand relevant issues.

Make Performance Data Meaningful

The Indiana Partnerships Center has created a guide that walks parents through the Indiana Accountability System for Academic Progress Web site. The site includes information on Indiana academic standards, accountability, professional development, school data, and much more.

The Indiana Partnerships Center's guide is designed to help parents understand the school data portion of the Web site by providing a graphic of each relevant Web site page with large red arrows pointing to where parents should click on the screen. Hints like "Scroll over bars on this graph to find out how many students took and passed this exam" and messages like "Don't panic!" are interspersed throughout the piece.

This downloadable guide is available electronically on The Indiana Partnerships Center's Web site (www.fscp.org) or in print by calling 317-205-2595.

Establish and Coordinate Conveniently Located Parent Centers

The Indiana Partnerships Center is one of five PIRCs in the DOE's publication who ensures parents have a convenient location to pick up NCLB and other education-related materials and to meet with other parents or with school staff. These parent centers (not to be confused with the PIRCs themselves) are housed in Indiana schools as part of a basic strategy to further engage parents in helping to improve education.

Indiana now has some 75 school-based parent centers, with most in the Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS). The IPS Superintendent has required that all Title I elementary and middle schools develop parent centers staffed with trained liaisons.

The IPS district asked The Indiana Partnerships Center to train 57 new parent liaisons for this role, supported by Title I funding. Liaisons are trained in connecting with hard-to-reach parents, creating family-friendly environments in schools, effective parent engagement, cultural competency, helping parents support math and reading achievement, and much more.

The Indiana Partnerships Center has found the most utilized school-based parent centers are those located close to a school's front door or parking lot, but if that is not possible, what's important is that the center exists somewhere in the school.

The Indiana Partnerships Center's Checklist for Setting up a School-based Parent Center

- Seek approval from the principal.
- Schedule a planning session (about two hours) for interested parents and educators to create a vision statement, establish goals, create a framework for implementation, set a budget, plan the physical set-up of the center, and identify and organize what resources it will offer.
- Identify and train the coordinator who will deal with inventory, help parents use the computer, locate volunteers, and establish committees.
- Locate the items needed to furnish the center (lamps, tables, computer, phone, printer, etc.).
- Contact your state PIRC to request resources for the center.

Connecting With Hard-to-Reach Parents

Often, it is this very audience who is so crucial to reach in order to help both parents and students succeed. The Indiana Partnerships Center has developed partnerships with homeless shelters in Indiana to distribute NCLB information.

The Indiana Partnerships Center also places informational spots on Spanish-language radio and television stations to reach Spanish-speaking parents.

Facilitate Home Visits

In partnership with IPS' Title I office and the United Way's Bridges to Success program, The Indiana Partnerships Center's training of parent liaisons involves approximately 50 hours of training throughout the year. One of the key topics addressed is how to connect with hard-to-reach parents. Home visits are a primary strategy utilized to build trust with parents, invite their participation in school activities and establish positive relationships with the parent liaisons.

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

The Indiana Partnerships Center utilizes a question-development workshop to help parents become more skilled communicators within the education system on behalf of their children. The workshop training is based on the model of the nonprofit Right Question Project (RQP) in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

The premise: effective questioning is an essential tool for participating in a democracy. The Indiana Partnerships Center's RQP session is intended to help parents learn how to identify essential issues, formulate effective questions and feel comfortable discussing those questions with professionals in the education system, in order to better advocate for their children and help foster their success.

The RQP model is particularly helpful for parents who have children with special needs. For these parents, the basic RQP model is used, but the workshop coordinator infuses information about individualized education plans (IEPs). An "express IEP" has been developed that includes critical information for teachers about the needs of a child such as a short description of the disability, transportation and classroom needs.

Tips for Promoting Cross-Stakeholder Communication About Education Issues

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

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

As a PIRC Service, Provide Surveys on Schools' Family Friendliness

Six years ago, The Indiana Partnerships Center contracted with an outside agency to create the "Are We Family-Friendly" survey for distribution to Indiana schools. It is available in English and Spanish.

Among other items, the perception survey asks:

- how comfortable parents feel in their children's school
- how informed they feel about their children's performance and how to help them
- whether they are invited to participate in school activities and at what level
- how empowered they feel to address issues or concerns.

In turn, teachers are asked:

- how often and in what capacity parents are invited to participate in their children's education, both in the classroom and at home
- how informed they keep parents
- whether they make home visits and how often they solicit information.

In 2005, the IPS Superintendent required all Title I schools in the district to administer the survey. Given their role with parents, the parent liaisons were utilized to disseminate the survey and serve as a resource in the project. As a result, some 4,900 parents responded, with 880 (or 18 %) being Spanish-speaking parents whose voices may have remained silent without the translated survey. The Indiana Partnerships Center summarized the survey findings into brief, parent-friendly text with easy-to-read graphs and advice on next steps, based on the findings.

The analysis of IPS' 2005-06 survey identified "parents as decision-makers" as the area most in need of improvement. Based on this information, schools began considering how to get parents more involved in school decision-making, and The Indiana Partnerships Center undertook a review of its leadership training.

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

- Create and distribute surveys about schools' family friendliness to collect baseline data from parents and staff about what needs to be done to help parents become more involved.
- Recruit parent liaisons and community-based organizations to distribute the survey.
- Enlist the help of a local university to analyze the data results.
- Use the survey results to inform organizational practices.
- Distribute survey results to parents in clear language and format, using brief summaries with graphics and color.

Tips for Training Parent Liaisons to Effectively Link Parents and Educators

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

Identify and Adapt a Training Model

The Indiana Partnerships Center selected the Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership (CIPL) as the model upon which to base its program.

In adapting many of the elements of the CIPL model, all three featured PIRCs with such programs require that participants carry out a project in their schools to engage additional parents. These projects range from getting more fathers involved in school to creating children's book clubs and establishing a student math competition called Mathletics.

Again, focusing on the needs of their target audiences, The Indiana Partnerships Center recently identified the need for parent leadership training in Spanish and now conducts a Latino parent leadership academy, *Voices in Action*.

Recruit Participants Who Mirror Their Community

The Indiana Partnerships Center recruits its leadership trainees from its own database of contacts and by reaching out to other community organizations and education agencies. The Indiana Partnerships Center works to ensure a diverse pool of participants is found that mirrors their communities.

Unlike some of the other models, The Indiana Partnerships Center's leadership program requires that any school, district or organization nominating an applicant send candidates in teams of at least two (two parents or a parent and an educator). Parent candidates must have a child enrolled in an Indiana K-12 public, charter or private school.

Tips for Training Parents for Education Leadership

- Identify and adapt current successful models of parent leadership training.
- Enlist the help of community-based organizations, alumni of past trainings and education agencies to recruit diverse participants that mirror their communities.
- Take a train-the-trainers approach (train district staff who, in turn, train school staff).
- Evaluate and innovate a training program to meet the needs of targeted constituents regarding location, time requirements and informational needs of participants.

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

- Look for existing programs that facilitate partnerships and enlist program representatives' help or adopt their measures.
- Ensure teams are developing policies and practices that supplement and integrate with existing school policies and practices.
- Train other trainers to help ensure team efforts are sustainable.
- Employ those closest to the community to identify potential team members.

Conclusion

As a final note, The Indiana Partnerships Center echoes the suggestions offered by the U.S. Department of Education in their larger publication:

- **assess the needs of your constituents** – understand the range of communication and training needs of parents in the schools and districts being served as well as understand how different education agencies need to evolve in order to effectively include parents as partners
- **be creative to engage all parents**, including those hard-to-reach groups (living in remote areas, non-English speaking, homeless or who have developed a mistrust of schools due to their own education experience)
- **prepare parents and educators to operate as partners** by ensure both groups are familiar with NCLB parent involvement requirements and are adequately trained to work together
- **build greater organizational capacity** and avoid duplicative or conflicting efforts by promoting networks among multiple organizations that have similar goals, including parent involvement organizations, education agencies and a range of community-based organizations.

Additional Resources

BuildingChoice.org
www.buildingchoice.org

Harvard Family Research Project
www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/index.html

KSA-Plus Communications
www.ksaplus.com

National Network of Partnership Schools
www.partnershipschools.org

The Parent Teacher Association
www.pta.org

Parents for Public Schools
www.parents4publicschools.com

The Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence
www.prichardcommittee.org

The Right Question Project
www.rightquestion.org

The Southwestern Educational Development Laboratory
www.sedl.org/welcome.html

U.S. Department of Education Parental Information and Resource Centers
www.ed.gov



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