

Building Bridges
Between School
and Home:
Stories of Success
from
Lawrence County,
Tennessee



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Introduction

Children begin learning at home long before they start school, and even after they start school, they spend more time at home than in school. “Improving a child’s home environment to make it more conducive to learning is critical if we are to improve the educational achievement of our students and close the achievement gap” (Barton & Coley, 2007). Numerous studies have shown the positive effect of family involvement on student outcomes throughout the school years (Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez, & Bloom, 1993; Trusty, 1999; Simon, 2001). However, many teachers and administrators think of family involvement as consisting mainly of volunteering, helping with homework, and fund-raising. In reality, “what families do in the home environment remains significantly more important to student outcomes than what parents/families do in the school setting” (Carter, 2002). If what families do at home is important, then it is vital to help teachers understand the effect parents can have on student outcomes, and to show teachers how to help parents learn what they can do at home to help their children succeed in school. It cannot be assumed that parents instinctively know how to involve themselves in their children’s education. In fact, many parents feel inadequate in teaching roles.

As Carter (2002) found, effective programs have taught parents how to create a home environment that encourages learning and how to provide support and encouragement that is appropriate for the children’s developmental level. Teachers can increase student outcomes by helping parents to understand what children are learning in school and what they can do to help their children at different stages.

Just as we cannot assume that parents know how

to involve themselves in children’s education, we cannot assume that teachers know how to promote parent/family involvement. In fact, according to the MetLife Survey of the American Teacher (2006), 26% of new teachers report that they were not prepared to engage families in supporting their children’s education. Even more importantly, the same survey reports that new teachers with less than five years experience are more likely than their peers to feel adept at engaging family support. In addition, “Professional and in-service training for teachers that focuses on working with families is not yet widely available; nor do many pre-service programs across the country offer training for future teachers in the development of school-family relationships” (Kessler-Sklar & Baker, 2000).

“Effective programs have taught parents how to create a home environment that encourages learning and how to provide support and encouragement that is appropriate for the children’s developmental level.”

Building Bridges Between School and Family

The online course, *Building Bridges between School and Family*, was developed to address the issues listed above in a way that was time and cost efficient. Six educators in Lawrence County, TN, agreed to participate in a pilot running of the course. Because much of the class was completed on-line, participants worked on the course in their schools or homes after the school day, reducing the number of hours teachers would need to be out of the classroom. However, two sessions were conducted face-to-face, with instructors traveling to Lawrence County to begin and end the course. The purposes of this planned “face time” during the first session were to provide better understanding of the course content and goals, to introduce teachers and course facilitators to one another, to provide assistance in starting the online process, and to illustrate what

could be expected in each session. During the final face-to-face session, educators reflected on and summarized their learning.

Course Content

The course included two on-site sessions and three online sessions. Each session had specific topics, including: Science of Family Involvement and Communication; Promoting Positive Parenting; Enhancing Student Learning; Celebrating Diversity; and Tying it all Together. Activities for each session included a pre-test to evaluate prior knowledge, articles about family involvement, discussions, case studies, self-reflections, and a post-test to evaluate learning, as well as handouts that could be copied and distributed to teachers and to parents. The first session took place on-site at Lawrenceburg Elementary School in August, 2007, with on-line sessions in September, October, and November. Our final session, held in December 2007, pulled together the academic content and teachers' experiences.

Components of the course included:

- An overview of parent/family involvement research
- Individual and small group work in a variety of activities to provide self-assessment and pinpoint where individual improvements could be made in family/school partnerships

- Discussion of expectations for family involvement in school and classroom activities
- Creation of a plan for a family involvement project in each teacher's school, with subsequent reports on actions taken during the semester

Course Participants

The participants in this course included teachers and instructional coaches from six different schools, with an average of 20 years of teaching experience. The participants became involved in this course because they wanted to reach out to the parents of Lawrence County and improve parent involvement in the schools. The participants knew that a relationship between parents and teachers was crucial to the success of the students and the schools. Although each of the participants had taken steps to make parents a top priority in their schools, they felt they could benefit from additional training and information about parent involvement.

At the first session, each participant selected a project that she wanted to develop at her own school during this time period. These plans became action research projects that could be discussed and updated during the course timeline. The following stories chronicle the challenges, successes, and lessons learned that each participant encountered while completing their action research project.

~ Surveying to Invite Parent Involvement ~

When I began this job as the Family Engagement coordinator three years ago, I conducted a survey of the parents because I wanted to know how comfortable parents were inside our school. I wanted to know the comfort level of the parents when they entered the office, our cafeteria, our classrooms, and our library. The survey asked how often they volunteered. Had they offered to volunteer? Did the school call after they volunteered? I wanted to know what they had to offer. I gave a three page survey, which I found out very quickly was too long and not well written. I spent hours tallying the results.

The next year I decided to give a different survey. This time the survey was much shorter and focused more toward parent volunteering. I decided to focus this survey on volunteering because I saw the same parents being utilized over and over again. I was beginning to hear animosity from parents who wanted to be involved, but said they weren't called. So my goal was to figure out how to take care of that problem. I sent the survey out to all the parents asking what skills they had to share and what days they could volunteer. After the parents returned the surveys, I had a nice, overwhelming stack of surveys but wasn't able to do anything with them because other projects came up. So this year I gave yet another survey, and my action project became a project to finish what I



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Leoma Elementary serves
Pre-K through 8th grade
with over 550 students.*

started the year before. So, I sent out a shorter survey (See Appendix I) to again gather volunteer information. I processed the surveys, and I arranged the results by who was willing to work in various areas — for example, who was willing to work in the library and who was willing to work with the PTO. I even had “landscaping” on the survey. I had a

place for stay-at-home moms who were willing to do whatever was needed and the days they were willing to volunteer.

My original idea was to put this information on the school's website so teachers could easily pull up the list to see who had volunteered for what. However, I was unable to do this due to security concerns. Instead, I created a master list for the teachers that included the parents of their classrooms. I gave copies to the library, the PTO, and the office — essentially one for all the different areas for when I asked volunteers. I sent a list to the teachers, along with a note encouraging them to utilize each parent volunteer instead of calling on the same ones over and over. Continually using the same parents is understandable because it is easier for the teachers if the parents already know how to do what it is they are being asked to do. It is easier to call them and ask them to come in than to have a trainer or a mentor to come in to mentor another volunteer. It's just easier to call the same ones. So I encouraged teachers to utilize each volunteer even though it might mean a little ex-

tra work for them. I understand why teachers prefer to use the same volunteers again and again. For instance, when there is a field trip and chaperones are needed, the teachers want chaperones who are dependable, trustworthy, and helpful. So, while I fully understand why the teachers go with the same volunteers, I also understand the need and importance of giving every parent the opportunity to help. However, I stressed to the teachers that it is important to extend the effort to all parents who say they would like to volunteer. Periodically, I sent memos to the teachers: Remember the volunteer list? Have you lost yours? Do you need another copy? Have you contacted all the parents?

My goal is for every parent who had volunteered to be utilized at least one time. Even if it is just something small, it is important that each parent receive an opportunity to contribute. At the end of the year, I plan on distributing another survey to the parents (and one to the teachers) to find out what I can do to make the volunteer list easier for the teachers to use and to find out from the parents if they felt the volunteer program was successful. Did you volunteer? Were you called? Were you able to come? Was there a reason why you couldn't? What can we do to help? The feedback I have received from the teachers so far has been very positive. My only concern is whether the teachers are still using the same volunteers over and over or if they include everyone.

Another thing that grew out of this survey was a focus on our parent involvement in other ways. The response to the question which asked, 'How

comfortable do you feel in our library?' was mostly not applicable.

This response alerted us to the fact that we don't often offer activities that bring parents into our library.

Now, when we have family nights, we schedule activities in the library so parents have the opportunity to visit. This was an interesting situation which may have gone unnoticed if we hadn't administered the survey.

I was also able to distribute statistics to the teachers to show how the parents feel in various areas of our school. This allows us to identify what we can do to make the parents feel more comfortable in the school.

I learned from my previous surveys to narrow the information down so it was manageable. I was just a little overzealous with the first surveys because I wanted to collect as much information as possible and didn't even anticipate the amount of work and time it would take to compile the results. It wasn't a bad survey; it was a great survey. It was just too much.

I am proud of this project because I established a database of volunteers, their skills, and where they're willing to volunteer. That in itself is a huge feat, but then I also think of all the other things I did, like sharing data so teachers can make improvements in the school and classrooms to help parents feel welcome. This project also brought up the issue of the importance of using all parents and not just a select few. This project became so much more than just creating a database of volunteers. It's pretty impressive.

“My goal is for every parent who volunteered to be utilized at least one time. Even if it is just something small, it is important that each parent receive an opportunity to contribute.”

Grade-level Meetings Help Parent-Teacher Communications

For our project, we developed a grade-level meeting night. The activity was to provide an opportunity for parents to find out from the teachers what was expected of them and their children. Communication can be a real issue at our school. We sometimes have difficulty getting parents to come in — especially those we need to speak with. Like most schools, we are constantly changing programs, curriculums, and expectations.

We can't assume the parents understand it just because we do. We send home information and provide information at conferences. However, we have begun to realize that too often we aren't giving them enough information or reaching enough of the parent population. So we decided to begin our meeting by giving some general information first and then sending parents to their grade-level sessions. This way, the teachers could talk with them and they could ask questions and find out more about the expectations at each grade. We've found that what parents expect and what teachers expect are often very different. I wish we had scheduled the meeting earlier in the year. By the time we had the meeting, too many misunderstandings had already taken place, so we spent most of the time trying to clear up things and therefore couldn't focus on what we really needed to do. Our participation for this meeting was rather good. This was a new type of meeting and there were a lot of people there who had no idea what to expect. Some parents come to our meetings regularly and some don't. I believe our turnout for this meeting was higher because we provided food. Participation is



Kaye Allen is an instructional coach at Ingram Sowell Elementary School and has 33 years of teaching experience.

always higher when we provide food because this allows parents to come by taking two things off their already hectic plate: preparing dinner and the cost of a meal.

After the meal, parents went to the individual rooms to meet with the teachers. The teachers prepared a list of standards they are responsible for teaching. They also prepared a list of the assessments that they used. The teachers said they were able to get through most of the information they prepared, but most parents were focusing on questions like: How do you do homework? Because this question is so general, it was hard to address in the short period.

One accomplishment of the night was that we encouraged the parents to come back to parent-teacher conferences so that they could have an individual conference to address their specific questions. Because we were trying to reach all parents with this meeting, we couldn't take the time to address specific questions about individual children. The information we gave was general, such as our expectations for first grade. Therefore, parents didn't feel like they had enough time in one place. I think they also felt inhibited about what to ask and felt a little apprehensive about asking questions in front of the other parents. During the meeting I provided parents with a copy of the *Parent Guide for Working with Teachers* (Appendix II). I wish I had distributed these prior to the meeting because I think they parents would have been more informed about what to ask.

I've received a lot of good feedback since the session because parents have actually asked questions listed in the Guide.

Introducing Parent Involvement Kits at Parent-Teacher Conference Night

Last year, we spent some of our Title I money on items that teachers thought would be good classroom and parent involvement activities. After researching many products, the teachers chose Frog Family Fun Packs. These kits encourage parent involvement while their child practices a particular skill. The kits have different skills for the child to practice and offer activities that parents can complete with their child. We selected kits for first, second, and third grade. The goal was to train the child and parents on how to use the activities in the kits. The kits would eventually go home with the child each week so the parents and child could complete the activities and play the games together. We received the kits at the end of last year and we put them on the shelf until we could decide how to incorporate the kits in our parent involvement program this year.

We decided to introduce the kits during our parent-teacher conferences. The night of the conferences we offered different sessions that parents could attend while waiting for their opportunity to meet with their child's teacher. I wanted to revamp the way we had been offering the traditional parent-teacher conference. I wanted the night to offer something more than just going to see the teacher. Often there are long lines of parents in the halls, waiting to see teachers and they are just sitting there and getting frustrated. I thought if they had some other activities to rotate to while waiting — and could gain knowledge at the same time — it would make for a



Michelle (Shelly) Campbell was an instructional coach with Lawrence County Public Schools and has recently retired.

smoother flow. Plus, the parents would feel more involved and there would be more things going on while the parents wait.

My Title I assistant and I worked on signs and schedules promoting the Frog Family Fun Pack session. Parents could attend this session and learn more about the Frog Family Fun Packs and learn how to do the activities. We offered tootsie rolls (600 of them) to parents to entice them to attend this session. The evening started off somewhat slowly and we had very few participants in the beginning. But as the night went on, more parents came in for conferences and more came in to the Fun Pack session. The parents seemed to have a really good time with the activities and we considered the night a success.

However, that is as far as the project has progressed. We have completed the introduction and training on the Frog Family Fun Packs, but we need to carry it on to the next step. We are in the process of deciding where to locate the Fun Packs, which teachers are going to use them, how we are going to go about scheduling use of the Fun Packs, how we are going to spread the word that they are available, and how we will get them home and get them returned. The kits are still sitting in the boxes as of now. The parents have had the opportunity to work with the kits and know a little bit about what to expect.

If I were going to carry out this project again, I would do a few things differently. Because I didn't

have the turnout I expected, I would probably put more thought into sending information out to particular groups of parents instead of just sending out a school-wide notice of the schedule. I would put more effort into recruiting the groups of parents that would benefit most from having this informa-

tion, such as 1st through 3rd grade parents. I would also keep up the momentum instead of getting it going and letting it fizzle. It is hard to find the time to get it going again. Sometimes we have really good ideas but we don't always have the time or resources to carry them out.

Informing Parents of Their Child's Academic Performance

One of the things that the teachers in my school are really concerned about is how effectively we communicate how students are performing in subject areas. In order to help parents understand how their child is performing in school, we decided to supplement the report cards. We developed progress reports that we send to parents between report cards. These progress reports show parents how their child performed on assessments. However, when we looked at the progress reports, we noticed that we gave parents a lot of information but we didn't clearly define what the assessments were and what they measured. So, to effectively communicate how their child was performing, we started setting up informational meetings. We brought parents in for a session and gave a presentation on Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS). During this session we explained the components, defined some of the terminology, explained the benchmark and goals, and provided activities and strategies that parents could do at home to help their child. We also explained the tier work that we did in the classroom.

While the parents were in the DIBELS presentation, the children were working on Halloween activities. After the presentation, the children came back in and completed an AR (Accelerated Reader) computer activity with their parent. We gave each child and parent a book and they spread all throughout the building, reading together. They sat



Patty Welsh has over 20 years of teaching experience and as an instructional coach. She is currently a Title I teacher at South Lawrence Elementary which serves over 700 pre-K through 8th grade students.

on the floor, or wherever they could find a comfortable spot to read the book. After they read, we explained AR goals, what was expected of them, how the system worked in the classroom and how it factored into their grades. Then we let the parents and children take the AR assessment. Parents really liked the inter-

active session. They loved working with the computers, they got hands-on experience, they received a free book, and they were able to read together with their child. The children were so excited that they wanted to continue working with their parents on the AR activities. They wanted to show their parents

all about the AR program.

Although we considered the night a success, I was disappointed because we were trying to present too much information in too little time. We felt like we weren't able to adequately answer the questions that the parents had because of the massive amount of information we were trying to present. We were trying to do everything with this one DIBELS meeting and we should have broken it down into several smaller sessions.

In the past we weren't happy with the grades we were giving out because we kept saying we're giving them an 'E,' but these kids still have problems that are not identified. So, when we sent out the first progress report, the teachers were apprehensive because we were being very honest with the parents about their child's level of performance. However, after the reports went home the teachers began re-

ceiving numerous phone calls from parents seeking help. They wanted to know how to help their child. The parents asked teachers what needed to be done to help improve their child's skills and performance. So providing this information really did cause parents to become more involved. They asked for help and the teachers were able to give it to them. When the teachers saw the end result, they said that students were no longer falling through the cracks. Problems were identified earlier on. This allowed us to individualize our instruction and target the students' weaknesses. Teachers were able to work more closely with the low performance groups while the students who were performing on or above grade-level work independently.

My project was really about improving commu-

“My project was really about improving communication with the parents so they would know more than just a letter grade.”

nication with the parents so they would know more about their child's performance than just a letter grade. Instead, they would know what their child was doing and learning and how well they were actually performing. We developed a rubric (Appendix III) so parents could tell what their child's needs were and how to help in areas where they struggled. The progress reports specify the strengths and weaknesses of the student and give parents strategies.

When we do this again we will probably have grade-level meetings.

It's hard to ask your teachers and parents to keep coming in after school, so you have a large meeting but it's not as effective. Our meeting would have been more effective if the teachers presented the information at grade-level meetings.

Helping Parents Support Their Children's Literacy Development

In order to help parents understand DIBELS and what the scores mean for their child, we used our parent-teacher conferences to provide more information. The Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) are a set of standardized measures of early literacy development used to regularly monitor the development of pre-reading and early reading skills. We developed a brochure for the parents with information about DIBELS testing. In addition, we gave the parents the front page of their child's test scores so the teachers could explain what the benchmark was, what DIBELS is, and what their child's scores mean. I also made myself available so the parents could come to my room for further explanation. I had quite a few parents come and talk to me about their child's DIBELS scores.

To follow up, we've planned to have a DIBELS night in January after our next test so we can, hopefully, show growth. Unfortunately, we had very few who scored as well as expected for their grade-level (also known as "benchmarking"). One Kindergarten class had only 3 to benchmark and the other class had 2 to benchmark. We are working with the students who didn't benchmark and doing progress monitoring with them, especially in Kindergarten. Because of the work the teachers are doing with the students, we see a lot of growth and we know the students are going to do better on the second



Donna Wells is Co-Director of the afterschool program at Lawrenceburg Public School and helped to establish a Teacher Center in Lawrence County for all Lawrence County teachers to use.

benchmark. We think it will be encouraging to the parents when they see proof of the advances their child has made. I think this will help strengthen our relationships with parents by showing what teachers are doing and what they, as parents, can do to help their child. We are even developing some activities, games, and booklets that we will make available to parents who want to help their child but don't have the proper materials at home.

I think we are seeing really good results with DIBELS and

early intervention. There are things that we can do with children at an early age to help ensure their reading success. I was reading a book that said that there are two things that parents expect from schools and teachers: to keep their child safe and to teach their child to read. If we can't teach students to read, we've lost both the

child and the parent. So, our goal for January after we test, will be to compare our scores and bring our paperwork together and share the results with the parents. This time we will do grade-level meetings. We will show the parents the growth that their child has made and give them suggestions as to what they can do to continue the growth. We have a very active group of parents who want to help their children, but they just don't come to meetings. We will have to come up with some activities that will get the parents in for the meeting. That should be our next goal.

Helping Parents Learn More About DIBELS Progress Monitoring

DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) is the reading assessment that we use at our school for Kindergarten through second grade. Most parents are unfamiliar with DIBELS so I decided to have a DIBELS table at our Parent-Teacher Conference. I attended a DIBELS night that one of my colleagues had at another school in the district. I went because I am rather new to this position and I wanted to see how she approached the evening. My colleague shared information about DIBELS assessments during the session and then provided handouts for the parents to take home. After attending this session I decided that I would set up a table at my parent-teacher conferences to give out information on DIBELS. I conducted progress monitoring testing so the parents could see an actual test. I could also talk to them about the different sub-tests. We made up a tri-fold brochure (Appendix IV) that explained each sub-test of DIBELS and which tests were conducted at each grade level. We also included some activities that parents could do with their child to help. I explained to the parents the ways in which they could help their child become a better reader in each grade level.

In order to attract parents to my DIBELS table, I offered them information about DIBELS and I set up a computer with interactive websites that parents could go to. I ended up talking with over 50 parents. I didn't have the time to give an in-depth explanation of the testing process but the teachers were also talking about DIBELS in their Parent-Teacher Con-



Jane Hill is the Instructional Coach at New Prospect Elementary School in Lawrence County. New Prospect is a PreK - 8th grade school which has over 550 students.

ferences, so this gave them more personalized information about their individual child. You never know how many parents read the information they receive, but if three or four of them did, then that's great.

DIBELS testing is so complicated and since most parents have not been exposed to it, it is really hard to understand it. Next

year I will probably have a DIBELS night to explain it and then set up a table during the Parent-Teacher Conferences as well. There is so much information about DIBELS that I felt like I wasn't completely effective because I wasn't able to explain as much as I wanted due

to time constraints. Parents have limited time so I think it would be more effective to give the information in chunks. We probably need to offer multiple meetings to cover all of the information. I am also thinking about offering grade level meetings so I can be more specific with the information. For instance, I could prepare take-home packets for each grade-level which would contain sample tests, as well as specify simple activities and skills that parents could do at home to help their child become better readers.

We didn't reach everyone and we didn't give all of the information we wanted, but it was a good start. I hope all of the parents we were able to reach went away with at least a good feeling about somebody being warm and welcoming and wanting them to know something that would make a big difference to their child. I think it was a fabulous start and we are excited about continuing.

Lessons Learned

As with any educational endeavor, the facilitators of this course learned as much as the people who participated in the course. We learned lessons about what worked and didn't work as far as the logistics, online platform, course content, and communication between sessions by course participants and course facilitators. In addition, we all learned about the need for good planning, sharing between teachers, resources, and administrator support. Following are some lessons learned.

What did we learn about encouraging parent involvement in their children's education?

As educators thinking about parent involvement and trying out parent involvement projects in our own schools and classrooms, we learned that parent involvement comes in so many shapes and sizes...everything from helping out in your child's classroom, to a school-wide carnival, to checking homework, to listening to your child read to you each day. We had some great successes, and we learned from our mistakes. Our message to other educators: it can be a lot of work to involve parents, especially at first, but it is worth every bit of effort!

Planning for Parent Involvement: Quick Tips

- **Good planning is important – and sometimes it takes more planning than you'd think.** But the planning pays off in the long run. Keep notes on each activity, so it will be easier to do again (or change) next time.
- **Offer a range of ways that parents can be involved.** Parents are good at lots of things. Some parents love field trips and class parties. Others want

to help out in class, like making copies or creating bulletin boards. Some prefer to do things like heading up a school clean-up day. Others want to focus on helping their child and will appreciate every bit of information you can give them on academics.

- **Start your parent involvement projects early in the year.** We learned that it can take a long time to set up events and activities, especially if you are collaborating with other teachers and competing with many community events for schedule space. If you get parents involved early, they are there for you all year — so start early.

- **When using parent volunteers, don't use the same ones all the time.** Spread it around and get a lot of people involved. Parents often feel proud of their school involvement, and you want many people to have that opportunity. It's very respectful of parents and sends the message that you value their contributions when you ask for their involvement.

- **When you can, offer food as a part of the activity.** Food conveys warmth and hospitality – the kind of feeling you hope families get when they come to school.

- **If your parent involvement activities focus on children's learning, it's often better to divide up by grade level than to have one big whole-school activity.** The more a parent feels that the information or activity pertains to his or her child specifically, the better. So activities and events involving many parents and families may not be as effective.

- **Offer multiple informational events – don't overwhelm parents with too much information all at once.** As teachers, we don't always appreci-

ate how much information parents are given. Especially if you are trying to help parents develop new understanding or new skills, you may want to schedule several events and break up the content into manageable chunks.

- **Communication is key.** Parents want to know what is happening with their children. They want to know how their children are progressing. Often they want to understand the expectations for children, and how their children compare with others at each grade level.

- **It's important to be honest with parents about how their children are doing.** At the same time, recognize that the child is more than just his or her academic performance. Every child is a whole person with many gifts, and helping parents put things in perspective is important. A child may struggle in one area, but perform beautifully in another. Whatever a teacher's message is to parents, it must be truthful, sincere, and caring.

- **When you ask for parents to help children, be specific.** "Emma needs help with her reading" isn't as useful to parents as "Please go with Emma to the library each week this summer, check out a book she likes and take turns reading with her for 30 minutes every day".

What did we learn about how school administrators and others can support educators who are trying to increase parent involvement?

Principals, district personnel, university faculty and others working with educators to increase family involvement can really make a difference with their support. We've learned that there are specific and powerful ways that administrators and others can help teachers move forward with family involvement.

- **Let teachers know you value family involvement.** Talk about family involvement and encourage teachers to share success stories, as well as challenges.

- **Look for places where several interested educators could come together on a regular basis to learn more about parent involvement.** Invite a university to host a class for teachers on the topic, or find a teacher with experience to lead a study group.

- **Be flexible and recognize that teachers will take different approaches to family involvement.** Family involvement includes a lot — and teachers can come up with their own ideas. Support them in their chosen projects. Help them learn and grow in expertise.

- **Support teachers as they take risks to involve parents more deeply.** Notice their efforts. Talk with them about it, and let them know you support them.

- **Provide resources.** Help teachers find the time and money to carry out family involvement work. Resources are vital — whether it's supporting training and professional development, or finding funds to help with projects.

- **Encourage educators to plan specific family involvement projects, and to document what happens and share with others.** It's respectful of teacher's expertise to ask them to share what they know with others. Recognize educators who are

trying things — get them to talk in staff meetings and mentor and collaborate with other teachers who are trying for more parent involvement.

- **Recognize that learning the knowledge and skills needed to be good facilitators of family involvement takes time.** Be patient and keep offering your support. Build on the foundation that teachers create, and continue moving forward. You just may be surprised at the results family involvement brings!

APPENDICES

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Leoma Elementary School Parent Volunteer Form

Appendix II
Parent Guide for Working with Teachers

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Appendix I

Leoma Elementary School 2007/2008 Parent Volunteer Form

Volunteers are a vital part of the success of Leoma School. Please offer your time and talents by filling out and returning this form to your child's teacher. You and your child will be glad you did!

Student's Name _____ Teacher _____

Volunteer #1 Name _____

Relationship _____ Phone No.: _____

Volunteer #2 Name _____

Relationship _____ Phone No.: _____

Please mark the area(s) in which you would like to assist. You will be contacted with specific details as far in advance as possible.

- 1. Classroom volunteer
- 2. Library Help (various)
- 3. Office help (various)
- 4. TCAP Testing Proctor (partial days – April 14-18)
- 5. Hospitality
- 6. Beautification (landscaping, maintenance, repairs, cleanup, etc.)
- 7. Family Nights
- 8. Other talents you would like to share (music, arts or crafts, cooking, health & fitness, carpentry, landscaping, etc.) Help us build a program around your talents.

Thank you for your continued support of Leoma School.

Working With Teachers and Schools

Parent Guide

Parents provide the primary support for, and are the main source of information about, their children. It's the responsibility of both teachers and parents to help students succeed. Following are some tips for working with your child's teachers and other school staff.

- **Learn everything you can about your child's school.** The more you know, the easier your job as a parent will be. Be sure to read and discuss the student handbook with your child.
- **Access the school Web site.** Information about schedules of events, names of people to contact, rules and regulations is provided.
<http://lcss.us/schools/ISES/>
- **If your schedule permits, attend PTO meetings.**
- **Talk with your child's teacher early and often.** Get acquainted and show your interest.
- **If you notice a big change in your child's behavior, school performance, or attitude during the school year, contact the teacher immediately.**
- **If you notice your child is having trouble with a school subject, contact the teacher to find out how you can help.**
- **Don't go to the principal without first giving the teacher a chance to work out the problem with you and your child.**
- **If you disagree with a decision at school concerning your child, do not "bad mouth" the school in front of your child.** Talk with the proper people at school immediately, and be open and honest.

Parent-Teacher Conferences

Conferences can be a good opportunity to share information about your child. Following are some tips for successful parent-teacher conferences.

- **Believe that the teacher wants to help you and your child, even if you disagree about something.**
- **Be prepared to listen as well as to talk.** It helps to write down ahead of time what you want to discuss with the teacher.
- **If you don't understand something the teacher is saying, tell him/her.**
- **If English is your second language, you may need to make special arrangements,** such as including in the meeting someone who is bilingual.
- **Tell the teacher if you think your child needs special help,** and about any special family situation or event that might affect your child's ability to learn.
- **Talk about your child's talents, skills, hobbies, study habits and any special concerns,** such as sensitivities about weight or speech difficulties.
- **Ask about specific ways to help your child at home.**
- **If you don't agree with a teacher's policy, don't argue with the teacher in front of your child.** Set up a meeting to talk about the issue. Try to be positive and remain calm.
- **If at all possible, do not bring other children to the conference.**
- **If both parents are involved in the child's life, both should make arrangements to attend.** It will send a loud and strong message to the child concerning the importance of school.

Working With Teachers and Schools

Helping Your Child Prepare for Tests

Testing comes easily for some students but worries others. There are ways to help your child prepare for tests.

- **Talk to your child about testing.** It's helpful for children to understand why schools give tests and to know the different kinds of tests they will take.
- **Encourage your child.** Praise your child for the things that he/she does well. Feeling good about oneself will help in taking the test. Children who are afraid of failing are more likely to become anxious and make mistakes.
- **Make sure that your child attends school regularly.**
- **Provide a quiet, comfortable place for studying at home and make sure that your child is well rested on school days and especially on the day of a test.**
- **Don't get upset because of a single test score.**
- **Don't place so much emphasis on your child's test score that you lose sight of her well-being.** Too much pressure can affect test performance.

Most Importantly, Stay Involved!

- **Attend school events.** Go to sports events and musical programs, attend parent meetings and awards events.
- **If time permits, volunteer.** Look for ways to help out at your child's school.
- **You can help your child learn when you are at home.** Reinforce and extend what the school is doing.

Homework

Let your child know that you think education is important and so homework has to be done. Here are some ways to help your child with homework:

- **Have a special place for you child to study.** One that is fairly quiet and has good lighting will serve well.
- **Set a regular time for homework.**
- **Remove distractions.** Turn off the TV and discourage phone calls.
- **Don't expect or demand perfection.** Show interest and praise when work is done well. If you have criticisms or suggestions, make them in a helpful way.
- **Monitor and help your child understand homework assignments,** but don't do it for him/her.

Working With Teachers and Schools

Report Card Checklist

Report card time is fun for students who earn good grades, but it can be a worry for those who struggle in school. Try to keep grades in perspective and be supportive of his/her efforts.

- **Ask for a schedule of dates when report cards will be sent home.**
- **Read the teacher's comments.**
- **Praise the positive.** Congratulate your child not only on A's but also on getting better grades in subjects that are difficult.
- **Discuss successes and challenge your child to explain how he/she got a good grade.**
- **Create a plan to maximize future success.** Ask about homework. Does your child have enough time to complete it, or are extracurricular activities taking up too much after-school time? Are there distractions during homework time?
- **Contact the teacher if anything is unclear or if you need suggestions on how to help your child improve.**

—Adapted from U.S. Department of Education

Appendix III

1st Grade Progress Report

Student's Name _____ Beginning of Year Placement Test _____

DIBELS	1st Grade Goal	1st Grade Avg.	Student Score	Instructional Recommendation
Letter Naming				
Sept.				
Phoneme Segmentation				
Sept.				
Jan.				
May				
Nonsense Words				
Sept.				
Jan.				
May				
Oral Reading				
Jan.				
May				
Fluency				
Jan.				
May				

STAR reading report	Student's score	1st Grade average
Sept.		
Jan.		
May		

	Below level	On level	Above level
Sept.			
Jan.			
May			

Teacher's Comments: (Sept.) _____

(Jan.) _____

(May) _____

Parent/Guardian's Comments: (Sept.) _____

(Jan.) _____

(May) _____

Parent/Guardian's signature:

_____ Sept. _____ Jan. _____ May _____

Appendix IV

DIBELS

Intervention Activities for Nonsense

Word Fluency

- Use magnetic letters. Form 3-letter nonsense words — read the words
- Letter Flip – Create three stacks of letters on cards:
 - stack 1 – consonants
 - stack 2 – vowels
 - stack 3 – consonantsBlend the sounds
- Word chain – A word chain uses words that differ from each other by sound

Intervention Activities for Oral Reading Fluency

- Repeated oral readings of the same text
- Partner reading
- Audiotaped stories
- Echo reading

Intervention Activities for Retell Fluency

- Write predictions about the story
- Make a bookmark about the story
- Give main idea and supporting details

Intervention Activities for Word Use Fluency

- Play Guess the Word
- Talk about a picture
- Charades

DIBELS Content of Measures

1. Initial Sound Fluency (Kindergarten)

- measure the child’s ability to identify, isolate, and pronounce the first sounds of an orally presented word
- takes about three minutes to administer

2. Letter Naming Fluency (Kindergarten to Grade 1)

- measure the child’s ability to name as many letters as they can, uppercase and lowercase randomly mixed, within one minute

3. Phoneme Segmentation Fluency

(Mid-Kindergarten – End Grade 1)

- measures phoneme awareness by asking child to say the individual sounds that make up a word
- takes about two minutes to administer

4. Nonsense Words Fluency

(Mid-Kindergarten – Beginning Grade 2)

- measures the ability to link letters with sounds (knows the alphabetic principle and uses that knowledge to decode three-letter syllables that alone are nonsense words)
- takes about two minutes to administer

5. Oral Reading Fluency

(Mid-Grade 1 to Grade 3)

- measures accuracy and speed in oral reading of graded passage
- students read each of three passages aloud for one minute
- the median score is used

6. Oral Retelling Fluency

(Mid-Grade 1 to Grade 3)

- measures the comprehension of the passage read orally
- students retell as much as they can in one minute

7. Word Use Fluency

(Fall of Kindergarten through Grade 3)

- measures vocabulary knowledge and expressive language
- score is the number of words used correctly in one minute

Research Supports

- Reading problems can be prevented in most children
- Reading problems can be detected in kindergarten and early first grade
- Children with problems do not spontaneously get over them; they need to be taught how to read

DIBELS **can** measure critical foundations for reading that can be directly taught. We **can** catch children before they fail and intervene successfully; children should not have to fail before they come to our attention and receive preventative instruction.

DIBELS is a set of assessments that will predict how well children are likely to be doing in reading comprehension by the end of third grade. It will help teachers locate, monitor, and intervene with at-risk students.

Intervention Activities for Initial Sound Fluency

- Flash cards – give beginning sound on each card
- Cut out pictures from magazines and glue next to a given letter
- Sort pictures that contain the same sound
- Sort objects that contain the same sound
- Sing “Old MacDonald,” give the beginning sound for all the animals named in the song

Intervention Activities for Letter Naming Fluency

- Singing the alphabet with songs
- Match letter shapes to letter names
- Use magnetic letters to match uppercase to lowercase letters
- Use letter flash cards
- Use inflatable vinyl ball with letters written, at random, on the ball
- Use foam dice containing letters of the alphabet
Throw and let child identify letters
- String beads with letters written on the beads

Intervention Activities for Phoneme Segmentation Fluency

- Clap, snap, or tap the sounds in each word
- Isolate the sound – tell the beginning, middle, and end sounds in a given word
- Tap the sounds in a word
- Head, Waist, and Toes – the child touches his head for beginning sound, waist for middle sound, and toes for ending sound in a word
- Say-It-and-Move-It – The child moves a picture or object along an arrow as they sound out the word
- Count the sounds in a word

DIBELS

Dynamic
Indicators
Basic
Early
Literacy

Appendix V

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