Idaho School Boards Association
Summer Leadership Institute, 2016

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: A Function of School Governance

How Does Community Engagement *Fit* With
1. **Eight Characteristics of Highly Effective School Boards?**
   Characteristic # 4 – Collaboration and Communication
   Effective school boards have a collaborative relationship with staff and the community and establish a strong communications structure to inform and engage both internal and external stakeholders in setting and achieving district goals.

2. **Idaho School Boards Association (ISBA) Professional Standards?**
   Standard 5 – Community Engagement
   The Board encourages and seeks collaboration with families and community members, responding to diverse interests and needs and mobilizing community resources.
   Standard 3 - Advocacy
   The Board champions the district's vision by advocating for a thorough and efficient system of public education that reinforces education as a keystone of democracy.
   - 3.3. The Board advocates by establishing strong relationships with families, community, and others to help support students.

3. **Idaho Code?** Section 33-320
   (1) Each school district and public charter school in Idaho shall develop an annual plan that is part of a continuous focus on improving the student performance of the district or public charter school.
   (2) (a) The board of trustees and the superintendent [or the board of directors and the administrator of a public charter school] shall collaborate on the plan and engage students, parents, educators and the community as appropriate.

4. **Federal programs?**
   Title I, Migrant Education, etc., also mandate parent involvement and require policy commitments to support that involvement.
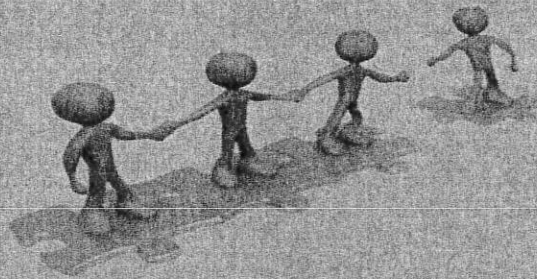
A Changing Paradigm: Family-School-Community Engagement

What Does the Changing Paradigm Involve?
- Advocating for schools and students through effective communication strategies designed to inform parents, community, and stakeholders of progress, needs, challenges, etc.
- Changing dialogue and expectations about community engagement
- Developing interactive partnerships among families, schools, and community
- Engaging in two/three-way interactive communications
- Explicitly clarifying that community engagement should maximize resources in support of student learning/student achievement
- Incorporating *family* versus *parents:* Providing inclusive environments and sense of belonging within school districts for families and including children
- Realizing that family may include: Grandparents as parents, single parents, multigenerational homes, same sex parents, homeless families, linguistically diverse families, foster homes, etc.
- Recognizing that partnerships require relationships that tend to strengthen the community overall, support a climate of belonging, and promote authentic participation by families, schools, and community members
- Understanding community: Socio-economic trends, cultural make-up, mobility trends, language needs, core values that may not reflect shared values within the larger community, etc. (Auerbach, 2012).

Family-School-Community Partnerships
- **What are they?**
  They are authentic relationships and partnerships among educators, families, and community groups
  (1) That are respectful in nature; and
  (2) That value relationship building, interactive dialogue across differences, and the sharing of power as part of the overall function of the school district within its community/ies (Auerbach, 2012).

- **What are the critical components of partnerships?**
  o Interactive dialog and relationships with an underlying core belief that both/all sides have something of value to contribute,
  o Parent/family advocacy,
  o Community revitalization, and
  o Focus on optimal achievement for all students (Auerbach, 2012).

- **Why are partnerships important?**
  o Children are more likely to find productive role in society when families, schools, and communities work together to support achievement.
  o Schools alone cannot effectively meet all needs of students and families.
  o Partnerships reflect the core principle of representative governance for school boards (Berns, 2009).

Family – School –Community Partnerships
- Emerging practices:
  (1) Empower and encourage involvement of *all* families,
  (2) Differentiate engagement based on the cultural, and socio-linguistic
      background of the families, and
  (3) Relate to community demographics
- Shared expectations: Need to be developed among all
- Shared understandings: Have the capacity to positively impact educational
  effectiveness and equity among student populations within a district/school
- Current gaps in parental – family involvement:
  - Between families and schools
  - Between culturally diverse families and schools
  - Between school district policy and practice
  - Between schools & community
  - Between student achievement and family involvement
  - Among schools, community, and families (Epstein, et al., 2009; Zarate,
    2007).

What we know
Students with involved family (regardless of socio-economics) are more likely to:
- Achieve higher test scores
- Attend school regularly
- Earn higher grades
- Enroll in higher-level academic programs
- Enroll in post-secondary education programs, and
- Graduate from high school (Turney & Kao, 2009).

Dynamics of Partnerships - They value:
- Relationship building
- Dialogue across difference(s)
- Sharing power in pursuit of a common purpose in democratic schools
- The capacity to address inequities and perceptions of injustice by families
  seen as different. (Auerbach, 2012)

Characteristics of Effective Communication
- Assume that everyone is capable of adding value to the dialogue
- Ensure transparency!
- Identify and recognize a diverse range of interests and perspectives on issues
- Provide for continuity and sustainability by developing long-range financial
  plan (Governing Board) to support efforts
- Share information, including decisions, community-wide
- Support community members' access to information and knowledge
  (Auerbach, 2012).

Where Does Policy Fit With Community Engagement?
- Policies highlight an existing expectation/practice or provide the framework for changing existing practices when change is needed or required.
- Parent-family involvement policies must be structured to:
    (1) Promote student success despite cultural, social, and/or linguistic differences, and
    (2) Effectively engage the diverse and unique range of families within a given community.
- Policy should also addresses family involvement requirements for Federal Programs, such as Title I, Migrant Education, etc., and in alignment within the overall design of the Board policy manual.

Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement/Partnerships
Epstein's framework is one among several models currently used in the U.S.
1. <u>Parenting</u>. Help all families establish home environments to support children as students.
2. <u>Communicating</u>. Design effective forms of two-way communication (school to home and home to school) about school programs and children's progress.
3. <u>Volunteering</u>. Develop opportunities for parent/family help and support; then recruit/invite them to get involved!
4. <u>Learning at Home</u>. Provide information and ideas that can help families learn how to help their children with homework, planning, etc. Be sensitive to cultural and linguistic differences among families.
5. <u>Decision-making</u>. Include parents in decision-making at school. Develop parent/family leaders and representatives.
6. <u>Collaborating with community</u>. Develop relationships with community-based services and resources to strengthen school programs, family practices, as well as student learning and development (Epstein et al., 2009).

Essential Questions

1. What is community engagement? Why do we want it? Why does it look different at different points and times (board meeting, board hearing, cottage meetings, school activities, etc.)? What changes, if any, must board members make to effectively support community engagement?

2. Within Board policy, what type of expectations should be articulated that deals with family-school-community partnerships, also known as community engagement? How would or should these be structured to allow creativity and exploration by each of the schools in your district as well as district-level development?

3. To what extent and/or how does a school board sitting in a board meeting influence what goes on in the school and classroom– and do it without actually being in the school and without micromanaging administration?