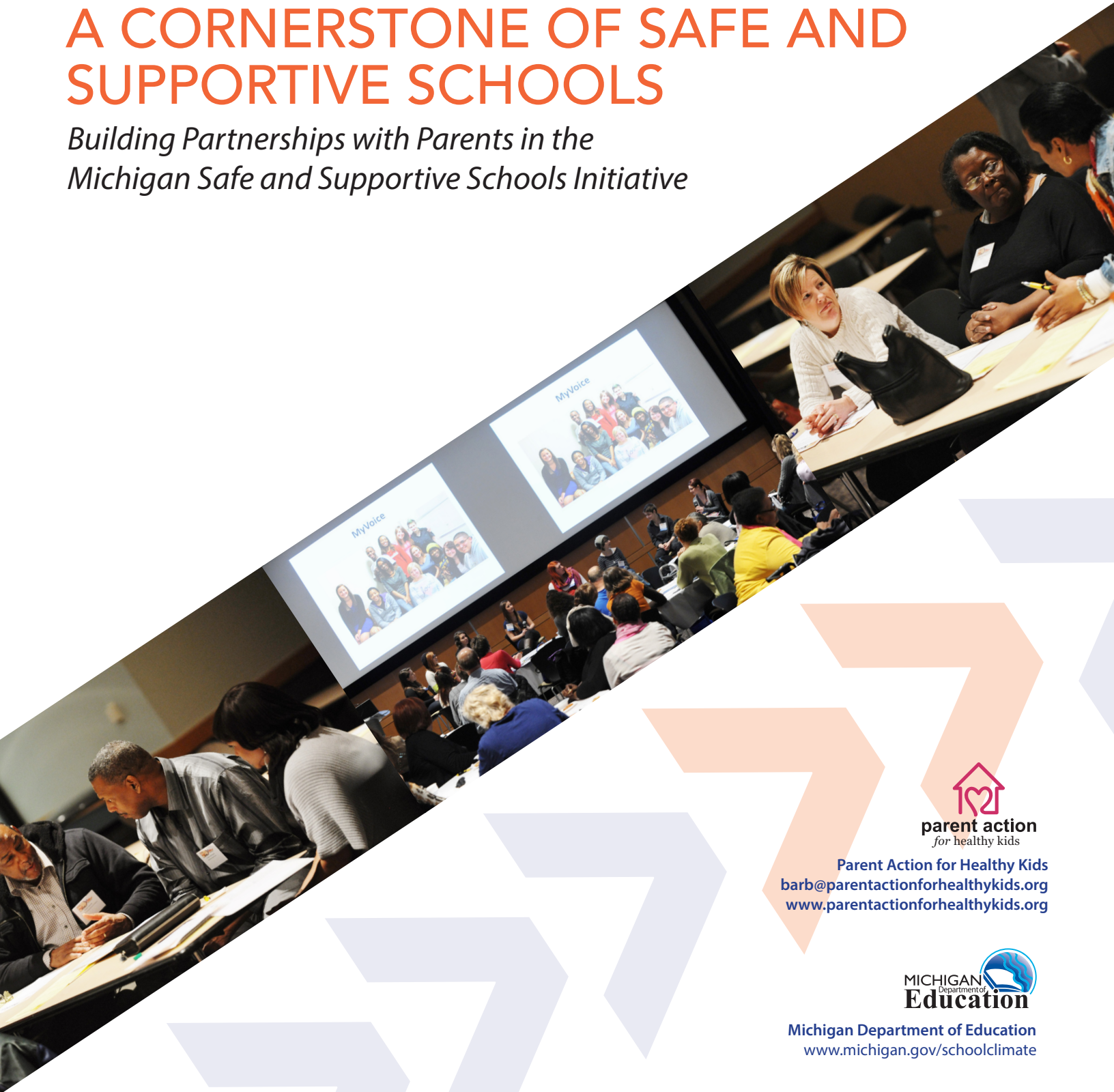


PARENT ENGAGEMENT: A CORNERSTONE OF SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE SCHOOLS

*Building Partnerships with Parents in the
Michigan Safe and Supportive Schools Initiative*



parent action
for healthy kids

Parent Action for Healthy Kids
barb@parentactionforhealthykids.org
www.parentactionforhealthykids.org



Michigan Department of Education
www.michigan.gov/schoolclimate

PARENT ENGAGEMENT IN SAFE & SUPPORTIVE SCHOOLS – GRANT IMPLEMENTATION IN MICHIGAN HIGH SCHOOLS

Safe and Supportive Schools (S3) is a federal grant-based initiative funded by The United States Department of Education; eleven states received S3 funding including Michigan. The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) received the largest grant award to provide programming over a four year period, for high schools with predominantly underserved adolescent populations who were below their requirements for “Adequate Yearly Performance” (AYP). Twenty-two high schools participated in and completed the four year grant initiative. Overall outcomes from the combined S3 effort and services across the 22 schools were significant:

- 65% increase in graduation rates¹
- 65% improvement in school safety scores²
- 52% reduction in bullying on school grounds³

The MDE provided these schools with evidence-based programming and services in eight key categories with S3 funding, including:

- Coordinated School Health
- Eliminating Barriers for Learning
- Meaningful Student Engagement
- Michigan Model for Health
- Restorative Practices
- Creating Safe Schools for Sexual Minority Youth
- Bully-free Schools
- **And Parent Engagement**

Barb Flis, Parent Engagement Specialist and Founder of Parent Action for Healthy Kids (PAFHK) was engaged by the MDE to develop and deliver the Parent Engagement component of this grant.

The primary objectives for Parent Engagement in the Michigan S3 grant were two-fold, including:

- 1 Providing schools with a deeper understanding of the potential and **value of Parent Engagement**
- 2 Supporting school efforts to **build partnerships** with parents that improve student academic success and well-being (physical, emotional, social)

This report provides an overview of the Parent Engagement education, programs, and activities that were delivered under the S3 grant, as well as the key findings and outcomes achieved through these efforts. In addition, this report shares “lessons learned”, including a discussion of best practices in Parent Engagement – both what works, and what to avoid.

¹ MDE, *Coordinated School Health and Safety Programs Unit, Michigan Safe and Supportive (MiPS3) reports*

² MDE School Reform Office

³ MDE, *Coordinated School Health and Safety Programs Unit, Michigan Profile for Healthy Youth (MiPHY)*

DEFINING PARENT ENGAGEMENT:

Parent Engagement is an often overlooked and underutilized, but fundamental element for helping our youth succeed – in the school system, in public health initiatives, and in policy. Parent Partnership initiatives build trusted relationships with parents – a sometimes difficult task when they may traditionally be viewed as apathetic, disconnected or even disruptive. Effective Parent Engagement requires changes to processes and policies – as well as education in order to create awareness of the value parents can provide when they are engaged in a transparent, collaborative manner.

S3 PARENT ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMMING: PHILOSOPHY AND APPROACH

The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) took an innovative approach to the S3 grant – being the only state out of the eleven participating in the S3 program to include Parent Engagement as a core offering. This was based on the philosophy (and well-published evidence) that improving communication, engagement, and access for parents – making them true partners in the education system – increases the success of all other programs and initiatives.

Parent Engagement was integrated across multiple touchpoints and throughout the grant timeline – including several mandatory components: a mandatory Professional Development (PD) session for all participating schools, completion of baseline and end-of-grant assessments, development of a mini-action plan, and participation in a dedicated Parent Engagement educational session at the live S3 conference (which was emceed by Barb Flis, the S3 Parent Engagement Specialist).

Parent Engagement was further supported by the dedicated S3 coaches that provided critical onsite expertise and guidance. These coaches helped with early identification and problem-solving for potential challenges, facilitated ongoing communication between the MDE, the schools and the topic leads, shared best-practices and learnings between schools, and served as project champions – providing regular reminders and a voice for the S3 initiatives.

To be effective, Parent Engagement interventions require a systematic approach in order to build a sustainable partnership with parents. Enthusiastic schools often attempt to reach out to parents before the right supporting elements are in place – support such as effective two-way communication channels or having a long-term plan and dedicated resources, including a Parent Engagement lead. Despite the initial gains in engagement and momentum, this lack of supportive infrastructure can actually end up further alienating and frustrating parents, and is one of the most common reasons Parent Engagement efforts fail.

VISION OF PARENT ENGAGEMENT IN ACTION

The “**Vision of Parent Engagement in Action**” that was shared with S3 participants provides an illustration of this success:

“Happy and successful students. Parents as engaged participants in policy and decision making. Two way communication between home and school. Attendance at parent teacher conferences and other school events. Working through conflict constructively. Increased volunteerism. Respect shown to students, teachers, parents and other staff.”

The development of all Parent Engagement initiatives & communications were guided by **FIVE OVERARCHING TENETS:**

- 1 Commitment to full partnerships with parents/caregivers
- 2 Transparent relationships – be willing and able to speak and hear the truth
- 3 Shared responsibility for student success – operate without blame or criticism
- 4 Embracing individuality – an absence of focusing on fixing or changing
- 5 Genuine and demonstrable appreciation

THE PARENT ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

The S3 Parent Engagement services followed a defined four-step process that first identifies the baseline status of Parent Engagement, then ensures that the proper infrastructure and process elements are addressed and in place before attempting to engage parents in the process.

- 1 Identify the “current state” of Parent Engagement at each school with **baseline assessment** (through surveys, physical review, in-person focus groups) of the:
 - School culture and perceptions of staff, administration, and parents
 - Existing communication practices: channels, frequency, content
 - Potential barriers to change, such as: workload, competing requirements, school policies, etc.
- 2 Establish **goals and objectives** based on the gaps and opportunities identified in the assessment process.
- 3 Develop a **plan of action** that:
 - Starts with small, achievable steps
 - Addresses infrastructure barriers (e.g., policy and communication)
 - Includes a strategy for sustainability – while accounting for competing priorities and resource constraints
 - With ongoing education and transparent communication build awareness of what Parent Partnership is and the goals the school hopes to accomplish through this effort
- 4 Apply a rigorous process for **ongoing evaluation** of progress towards the established goals (with purpose-built Parent Engagement evaluation instruments) and course correct as appropriate. Repeat these four steps in a continuous quality improvement approach as needed.

For additional information on the requirements of designing an effective, sustainable Parent Engagement initiative, an overview of best practices is included at the end of this report.

HOW CAN A SCHOOL IDENTIFY THE NEED FOR PARENT ENGAGEMENT?

- Low participation in parent teacher conferences and school events
- Parents are not included and/or not participating in school policy and decision making
- Parents seem apathetic and/or often non-responsive
- Parents seem disconnected from the educational experience
- A large number of parents seem “angry” (frustration may manifest as anger)
- Staff discussions around parents are generally negative or judgmental in tone
- Staff perceive that involving a parent will make things “more difficult”
- Staff meetings lack a “parent communication” agenda item
- Parents are not asked what they think (survey, focus group, one-on-one conversation)

S3 PARENT ENGAGEMENT – FINDINGS, PARTICIPATION, AND OUTCOMES

INITIAL FINDINGS

The School Assessment completed pre/post intervention by the building administrator provided baseline information on the current status and readiness for Parent Engagement. This assessment revealed minimal engagement activities happening in the building.

I think the parent should be a lot more involved in decisions and policy making of the school, and we are not unfortunately.

~Parent

The Staff Perception Assessment of Parent Engagement (administered at the initiation of the Parent Engagement efforts in the mandatory Professional Development sessions) revealed several significant perception barriers among administration/staff. However, while the issues identified are barriers to effective Parent Engagement, it is worth noting that they are not uncommon – and in fact, are the same issues faced by most schools across the country.

- The majority (54%) of school staff believed that: **Parents don't have the training or background to take part in making the school policies.**
- Almost half (48%) held the belief that: **Educators and parents don't have complimentary expertise with respect to the education of children.**
- And a full **41% of school staff didn't think that parents felt welcome in their child's school.**

The identification of underlying perceptions like these, is the first step to reducing barriers that impede parent partnerships – and is a critical first step to inform the necessary changes to policy and infrastructure development.

PARTICIPATION

It is important to note, that with the exception of two “mandatory” Parent Engagement elements (detailed in the previous section) — schools had the option of deciding the extent to which they would participate in the Parent Engagement grant offerings and services. That being said, **86% of the S3 schools participated in Parent Engagement offerings above and beyond the minimum requirements.**

OUTCOMES

The semi-optional approach with the Parent Engagement intervention limited the ability to measure comparative effectiveness on Parent Engagement across all schools. With that being said, however, the intervention showed statistically significant progress:

- 73% of the S3 schools reported Parent Engagement strategies were being implemented or likely to be implemented
- 14% of the S3 schools showed statistically significant progress (formation of parent groups, increase in parent/staff communication and attendance at parent/teacher conferences and other events). Three of the schools achieving exceptional Parent Engagement outcomes, included Clintondale High School, Fitzgerald High School, and New Haven High School

While success for Parent Engagement looks different for every school based on their unique goals and environment, several key indicators and measures can be used to evaluate improvement.

S3 PARENT ENGAGEMENT – INTERVENTION-SPECIFIC OUTCOMES

A survey at the end of the grant of the Building Liaisons and Coaches revealed that these Parent Engagement metrics were well met at their schools, reporting:

- An increase in parental involvement and engagement
- Improved communication between staff, students and parents

I think all stakeholders are benefiting from parents being involved, the parent, the teachers and the students.

- Staff Member

Quantitative and qualitative insight captured directly from the school administration, staff and parents that participated in the S3 Parent Engagement initiatives, confirmed these findings:

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional development efforts achieved **measurable changes in perceptions and attitudes, as well as improvements in processes which foster Parent Engagement**. Examples include:

- **Enhancing communication resources** to improve the parent-school partnership (school-wide newsletters, marquees, parent-teacher events, website revisions, positive contacts to parents)
- **Changing parent communication content with positive emphasis and engaging language (non-threatening or education laden) language** (*as an example: Positive Postcards to parents*)
- **Actively modifying personal attitudes** (through reflection and reframing exercises) about parents (suspending judgments, stereotypes...) and **engaging in efforts to improve the school climate towards parent relationships**

FOCUS GROUPS

Focus Groups produced **improvements in perceptions from both parents and staff**, which were beneficial in developing mutual respect and common ground:

- **Staff acknowledged the importance of parents in educating youth and supporting educators**
- **Parents acknowledged the enormity of the task of educating youth**
- **Both constituencies desired more parent involvement**

PARENTS IN ACTION

- **Formal parent groups were initiated** at several schools-improving two-way communication and helping to build collaborative “relationships”
- Additional improvements were reported with **increases in: volunteerism, parent attendance at school events, and in parent-initiated communication**
- School administrators also observed key benefits that extended beyond the objectives of the pilot: **with many Michigan schools competing for students with “open” systems – improved relationships with parents provided much-needed positive “Parent-to-Parent” references and referrals**
- Staff beared witness at parent workshops and parent conferences that parents were thirsty for information and desired a connection with their students’ school

FOCUSED EFFORTS DELIVER BIG SUCCESS – RECOGNIZING WINS IN PARENT ENGAGEMENT

Not surprisingly, the most significant outcomes achieved in Parent Partnerships within this grant program were among those schools who selected Parent Engagement as a focus for their S3 efforts. The three schools with the highest levels of participation fully embraced the key tenets of Parent Engagement, and their dedication of time, energy and resources returned impressive gains. These gains are even more impressive as all of the schools participating in the S3 grant were high schools – where it can be significantly more challenging to change culture due to the number of competing priorities (curriculum requirements, college prep, testing, athletics, etc.)

Following are a few examples of the Parent Engagement these schools achieved with the S3 grant.

WINS: CLINTONDALE HIGH SCHOOL – EMBRACING INDIVIDUALITY!

The Clintondale school community is steeped in tradition and pride. But when education funding diminished, the district became a school of choice opening their enrollment beyond the borders of the community. As a result an unintentional divide opened between parents “in the community” and those that were “out of the community.” This was especially evident in the attitudes and beliefs expressed by focus groups participants.

The Parent Resource Consultant, under the leadership of the Building Liaison (a role established as part of the S3 grant) took ownership of the Parent Engagement process at Clintondale. She reviewed the data from the professional development and focus groups; utilized Parent Engagement survey instruments, and took advantage of all other Parent Engagement assistance afforded through the grant - including specialized consulting from Barb Flis of PAFHK.

As a parent in the district herself, the Resource Consultant’s understanding of the parent point of view, willingness to try or “test” various approaches, and her use of the survey data (which was key in identifying the issues dividing the two communities of parents) slowly started to gather momentum. She gained the support of parents and school administration when they realized that the parent voice is the strongest and best channel for sharing good information about what’s happening at school. (And those vocal parent advocates are especially important for an open-enrollment school!)

During the later part of the grant, a parent group was established, and they adopted their own goals and objectives. They are utilizing social media to share all the great things that are happening in school and meet monthly (including the summer months). Equally important, the administration and staff are now “all ears” about what parents have to say and are taking a keen interest in the evaluation data.

The data collected show promising results:

- An increase of over 47% in Parent Engagement activities
- Teachers report increased use of communication strategies for Parent Engagement
- Increased attendance at parent-teacher conferences
- Participated in 67% of the Parent Engagement grant strategies
- Teachers reported positive changes in their attitudes toward parents.

At the Parents Night Out I learned about resources that I was unaware of and that there is still a need for parent participation. Once my daughters reached High School I assumed there wasn’t a need for parent involvement any longer however I am glad that those opportunities still exist. I am Clintondale!!!

~Parent

WINS: FITZGERALD HIGH SCHOOL – COMMITMENT TO FULL PARTNERSHIP!

While Parent Engagement was a new initiative at Fitzgerald High, the administration and staff were open to innovation and change, committed to developing full partnerships with parents, and dedicated to achieving outcomes. Despite their enthusiasm for change, the concept of Parent Engagement was a new, and uncomfortable area for the school and staff – as the building principal shared, **“We have never had this sort of help with engaging parents before; it’s all new to us.”**

The schools’ S3 Building Liaison and Parent Resource Consultant focused their efforts on a few key areas that directly affect student academic success, including:

1. Building relationships with parents and staff, especially for higher risk students
2. Increasing use of the on-line parent, student and school communication platform “Power School” to monitor progress and success of the pilot
3. Increasing attendance at Parent Teacher Conferences

To maximize success they utilized the survey instruments provided, and reached out with personal invites as well as follow up calls. Data collected as part of these initiatives revealed success across all three of the goals (detailed above):

- An impressive increase of over 138% in Parent Engagement activities
- Teachers report an increase in their intent to act/change on Parent Engagement to 69% from a baseline of 49%
- In addition, teachers had an increase in their actual outreach to parents from 7% at baseline to 20%, and demonstrated improvements in their parent communication strategies
- The use of the Power School communication platform increased, along with attendance at Parent Teacher Conferences

And perhaps most importantly, the staff and administration recognize the value parents bring to the school’s efforts to improve academic success of the students.

WINS: NEW HAVEN HIGH SCHOOL – BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH TRANSPARENCY!

This is a small community with a rural culture; and through meetings and focus groups it was evident that school staff and parents had a strong commitment to the community and to the school. It was also evident, however, that there was frustration among staff and parents that their voices weren’t being heard. As a result, negative attitudes and beliefs loomed and Parent Engagement was extremely fragmented. To address these issues, and bridge the gap between these two highly invested groups, this school participated in 53% of the Parent Engagement strategies.

These efforts were made possible by the dynamic leadership of the school principal – who led by example with his direct and transparent communication style. This extended to his staff, the New Haven school was unique as they consistently brought a full team to professional development activities (as compared to other schools who may have sent a single delegate or school liaison representative. A key finding from these engagement initiatives was the need for a parent leadership group – and as a result the “New Haven High School Parent Group” was formed.

Barb Flis of PAFHK provided expertise and counsel to help organize and facilitate the development of this group, and in time it started morphing into a parent-owned and driven initiative. The principal, when possible, attended these meetings to provide updates and receive feedback. Parents have increased confidence that their voice is being heard, and it shows in their attendance at meetings and their leadership at events - making the building a welcoming place for students. As one parent said at the last meeting, **“I am made to feel welcome here.”** Equally important, the school staffs’ fear that a parent group would end up being a “complaint session” has been dispelled. By the end of the grant, New Haven reported on their building assessment that **88% of Parent Engagement strategies were implemented or likely to be implemented in the school.**

S3 PARENT ENGAGEMENT – BEST PRACTICES

Assess, identify, and confirm – make sure you understand the baseline culture and underlying issues contributing to Parent Engagement. Assessment is one of the most important elements, both at the beginning of your efforts and ongoing. Assess staff attitudes, determine if leadership is on board, identify what political and/or other issues need to be addressed, talk to parents, survey parents (sometimes they won't tell you face-to-face).

Set realistic expectations, start small, build big – and don't try to do it all at once. Assess how much time you really have or can give – it's better to have a series of small successes than start big and lose momentum. For Parent Engagement this is especially important – because you don't want to disappoint parents (it will be twice as hard to gain their trust and engagement the second time around.)

Plan each step of the process – before you start. Schools have competing priorities, leadership issues, and high turnover – make a plan for continuity and how will you sustain the change process once you start.

Communication is a top priority. And don't forget the "simple" stuff. Bringing parents, staff and administrators together requires a non-confrontational, collaborative approach and transparent communication. Make sure time and availability are considered, that the method of communication is diversified, and that those methods are accessible. Do an audit of websites, newsletters, information sheets, text and phone programs to make sure contact information is included, font is legible, language barriers are addressed, etc.

Build the infrastructure. Develop the policies, processes and core program elements that will ensure both initial success and long-term engagement...all while accommodating the day-to-day realities of the public school. Parents come and go, so it is critical that you build the infrastructure within the school to make Parent Engagement sustainable over time.

Seek out community partners. Most schools need a lot of resources to ensure a supportive and healthy culture for students, staff and parents. Whatever those resources may be (food pantry, clothing drive, Zumba classes) your energy will be better served finding long-term partners to bring them into your school.

Keep your message real – and keep on message. There can be peer pressure among school staff to maintain the "status quo", particularly with Parent Engagement. A feeling of "us against them" is common – and the room can be "hostile". It's important not to curate your message or censor your language to the audience if you feel resistance. Change starts one person at a time, but more people are probably on board than you may realize.

Keep the 5 key tenets of Parent Engagement at the heart of your efforts, and appoint a champion who believes in the cause. When the day-to-day gets hectic (and when is it not?) having an individual who serves as a "connector" between parents and administrators or staff is invaluable. And that person needs to be an advocate – who truly believes in the value of having parents engaged in the school.

We are in this together. Engaging parents in an authentic partnership requires everyone (administration, staff, secretaries, food service, custodians and security). Don't mis-lead yourself and others into thinking it is the Parent Resource person's job to engage parents; it is not. The Parent Resource person can be a navigator for parents and help school personnel make connections and overcome obstacles. The Parent Resource person needs sufficient time and support to do his/her work effectively.

You can't just walk in to a school with a checklist of what needs to be done...you are coming in to their home as a guest – they are running the ship here. You have to offer respectful guidance – our list of priorities doesn't always fit into their day-to-day reality – the key is the ability to listen and understand what's going on.

- Barb Flis

LESSONS LEARNED (LL): IMPROVEMENT FOR FUTURE EFFORTS

- **The presence of an onsite coach had a significant impact on success:** The S3 grant execution had unsurpassed support and communication at the state level from the Michigan Department of Education as well as dedicated coaches (with one coach per four schools and a lead coach as part of grant).

LL: Providing a dedicated “Parent Champion” is critical. Any school effort has a better chance for success when parents are a part of the equation. Many times, parents are an afterthought. A champion who continually says “what about parents?” is the key to success which will make Parent Engagement a part of the way a school does business.

- **Be aware of the stories that are told.** Stories of how parents are not measuring up is often talked about so much that it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Keep positive parent stories going and watch how quickly the school climate changes for the positive.

LL: Pay attention to stories and use of words. Help staff to re-frame a negative to a positive. A guide we used in the mandatory Staff PD (when talking about a parent or parents) was “is it true, is it necessary to say, and is it kind.” It is not enough to say it but to practice it. Allow a few minutes at staff meetings to share positive stories about parents. At committee meetings have an empty chair and put a sign on it that says “parent.” This will help everyone to keep parents at the forefront. And before long a parent will be filling that empty chair.

- **Schools are limited in number of staff developments they can offer every year** – and there is always an equally important competing need.

LL: The majority of the schools probably would not have made time for the Parent Engagement PD had it not been mandatory. If the needle is to be moved on Parent Engagement then it must be an “equal opportunity” intervention.

- **Become a navigator** - Parents, for the most part, are not in the education business. Translate education “jargon,” and breakdown school policies and processes to simple language and stories that are understandable and motivate parents to partner in the effort. Parents want to know what the school is doing to help their child learn and succeed.

LL: Parents want to be proud of the school their child attends. However, parents can be easily intimidated and will feel shame thinking they should naturally know how a school/classroom operates. Make it as easy as possible for parents to be a partner. Instead of saying our teachers “differentiate instruction” say “our teachers tailor instruction to meet the individual needs of each student.” Create an atmosphere where “there is no such thing as a stupid question.” Then sit back and watch the climate change.



EXAMPLES IN REAL LIFE:

At one school staff complained that parents wouldn't pick up their calls. They interpreted this to mean the parents weren't interested in talking to them. However, due to a glitch in the automated calling system – parents had been receiving a multitude of duplicative calls from the school. And when they saw that same phone number yet again, they no longer picked up. **Lesson Learned? Avoid assumptions – assess, identify and confirm everything!**

As participants were dispersing after a professional development session that had included a handful of particularly challenging and confrontational naysayers, Barb received a note from a gentleman who'd sat quietly in the back of the room. It said simply: “The parent is my boss.” **Lesson Learned? We have to remember that the loudest voices don't speak for everyone.**



APPENDIX A: THE S3 PARENT ENGAGEMENT COMPONENTS

A comprehensive suite of education, services and activities were incorporated and delivered throughout the S3 grant period. While not an exhaustive list, these initiatives included:

● PROFESSIONAL STAFF DEVELOPMENT ON PARENT ENGAGEMENT

A mandatory professional development (PD) session was scheduled at each school during the first and second years of the grant. The interactive PD introduced the concepts and philosophy of Parent Engagement; guided staff through activities to re-frame any negative attitudes or beliefs they may have held about parents and inter-wove exercises of compassionate reflection about parents. During this session the school administrator completed the building assessment, and staff completed the perception assessment. Staff each created a mini-action plan identifying three (achievable) steps they would take as a result of the PD.

PARENT ACTION FOR REALITY **MICHIGAN Department of Education**

School Assessment Instrument

Instructions: For each of the items, please place a check in the box that best reflects parent involvement in your school building.

	YES		NO	
	OK	Could Improve	Could Do It	Not Possible Now
The school provides parents with clear information on class level achievement expectations, school activities, school policies, discipline procedures, assessment tools, and school goals.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The school promotes informal activities that facilitate the interaction of parents and staff.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The school conducts an annual survey of families on students' needs and families' suggestions and reactions to school programs.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A special effort is made to reach parents not normally involved.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The school provides staff development on effective communication techniques.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

● PARENT, STAFF & STUDENT FOCUS GROUPS

Approximately one-third (9) of the schools elected to further explore the current status of Parent Engagement within their building through focus groups. These individually grouped (Parent, Staff, Student) sessions identified both areas of success and opportunities for improvement. Findings from the focus groups helped to identify areas of concern or issues that needed further investigation. In addition, participants expressed appreciation for having their ideas heard and validated. Communicating the results of the focus groups served to change perceptions and build shared understanding between parents and staff.

● CONTINUING EDUCATION

A series of educational Parent Engagement events were provided throughout the four year grant. The mandatory 2013 S3 Conference provided the opportunity for a mid-point check-in with all S3 schools, and included a breakout session for Parent Engagement. This session, "The Hard Work & Heart Work of Family & Community Engagement", introduced the importance of partnerships in sustaining long-term Parent Engagement success and provided detailed guidance on recruiting and retaining partner relationships.

Additional Parent Engagement PD was delivered on-site through optional Lunch & Learns and Staff "Booster" sessions. Each year off site PD was offered. These include:

- *Share & Learn (101 & 201) – A forum for buildings to share what they have put into practice*
- *The Art of Creating A Dynamic Parent Event – Creating an engaging event to keep parents coming back*
- *Transparency Without Trouble. How to Engage Rather than Enrage Parents!*

● PARENT CONFERENCES AND WORKSHOPS

In an effort to model and support communication between schools and parents, workshops were designed on areas of specific interest to parents on behalf of the participating schools. Workshops included:

- *Talk Early Talk Often® - Parents talking to their kids about sex!*
- *Think. Respect. – An interactive workshop to share and inform parents of the S3 initiatives.*
- *Fiscal Fitness for Families – Helping Your Kids with \$\$\$ Management!*
- *Sexually Transmitted Diseases – Know the Facts!*

A key offering was the Talk Early & Talk Often® Parent Connection Conference. Held in spring 2013 and 2015, this day long conference at its debut drew over 100 parents on a Saturday.

● CUSTOM PARENT ENGAGEMENT CONSULTING & RESOURCES

All participating schools were offered additional resources, tailored education and events, and one-on-one consulting based on their individual needs and expressed or identified concerns. Provided services included development and delivery of custom onsite workshops and guidance/consulting in the development of a parent group/organization.

Parent groups can be an especially valuable strategy for forming parent partnerships – when properly facilitated and executed, they provide a forum to give parents a voice, improve two-way communication between the school and parents, and serve as an early warning tool to identify and resolve issues before they become wide-spread problems.

● EVALUATION & ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENTS

A suite of evaluation instruments were developed and made available to the schools to determine level of parent satisfaction and education/information program needs. These include:

- Open House Evaluation
- Parent-Teacher Conference Evaluation
- Parent Workshop Evaluation
- The “Parent as a Customer” Comment Card

At the start of the grant assessment instruments were developed to determine baseline status and readiness for Parent Engagement. These included the School Assessment (completed pre/post intervention by school administrators) and the Staff Perception Assessment that were used to identify key gaps or opportunities, and to better understand the baseline culture of the school.