



Chapter 4: Linking To Learning

LINKING TO LEARNING

For years, schools across our district have hosted the same events, scheduled the same workshops, and sent home the same newsletters. Why? Because we've "always done it that way." Imagine what we could do if we provide our staff the opportunity to apply what they've learned about *Linking to Learning* and the *Joining Process* to revamping current Parent Involvement practices?

Parent Involvement does not necessarily mean adding one more thing to a teacher's busy day. In most instances, it simply means "tweaking" what we already do to get maximum effectiveness.

Chapter 4 will help staff understand how they can use what they are already doing with Parent Involvement and *Linking it to Learning*.

Goals for Linking to Learning

Participants Will:

- Identify various activities that their school is already doing in the *Linking to Learning* areas (handout)
- Examine the "why" behind the events/activities through a Gallery Walk
- *Possible Optional Activity: Revamp a current school-wide activity (Open House, P/T Conferences, etc) utilizing the *Linking to Learning* and *Joining Process* philosophies **OR**,
- *Possible Optional Activity: Revamp a current classroom Parent Involvement practice (classroom newsletters, progress updates, written communications) utilizing the *Linking to Learning* and *Joining Process* philosophies

Materials Needed:

- Chart paper labeled with the Linking to Learning Headers
- *The Power of Partnerships* DVD
- *Linking to Learning* headers
- Computer and projector
- Pens/pencils/markers
- Post-it notes or index cards
- Kagan or other soft music to play during the Gallery Walk

Handouts Needed:

- Reflection form



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Background Information

Linking to Learning aims to help families support their children's learning, both at home and at school. Most schools offer programs like reading workshops, family math nights, and home learning packets. When you consider all other activities and events that schools provide for families, though, how closely are they connected to student learning? Clearly, the more a program is expressly designed to improve student achievement, the more impact it will have on student learning.

Linking to Learning activities help families:

- Get a clear idea of what their children are learning and doing in class
- Promote high standards for student work
- Gain skills to help their children at home
- Understand what good teaching looks like
- Discuss how to improve student progress

"Of course, schools should keep holding open houses and Fall Fairs. They're great relationship builders and they can be a lot of fun. We don't mean that every family activity has to include a test-prep drill. Aim for balance. Almost any activity can include a link to learning."

Beyond the Bake Sale The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships. Henderson, Mapp, et al. p.82

These are just a few examples of what experts have found:

- The research on parent involvement strongly suggests that the most effective forms of involvement are those which "engage parents in working directly with their children on learning activities in the home." (Cotton Wikelund, 1989, p.2).
- According to *Researching All Families*, a publication of the U.S. Department of Education, "parents, regardless of their background, want guidance from schools on ways to help their children learn better...parents look to schools even if they can't make the first contact themselves." *The Designbook for Building Partnerships. Blank and Kershaw, p.5 (2001)*
- "The vast majority of parents are willing to assist their students in learning, but many times are not sure what assistance is most helpful and appropriate. Helping parents connect to their children's learning enable parents to communicate in powerful ways that they value what their children achieve." *A New Wave of Evidence. Henderson and Mapp, p.11 (2002)*
- Key Findings – "Programs and interventions that engage families in supporting their children's learning at home are linking to higher student achievement." *A New Wave of Evidence. Henderson and Mapp p.25 (2002)*
- Over 30 years' research has proven beyond dispute the positive connection between parent involvement and student success. Effectively engaging parents and families in the education of their children has the potential to be far more transformational than any other type of education reform. *National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs. National PTA, p.5 (2004)*
- "Middle and high schools need to provide workshops for Latino parents to help them understand what they need to do to support youth in this age group to succeed in school." *Involving Latino Families In Schools. Concha Delgado Gaitan, p.72 (2004)*



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Workshop Sequence

Welcome and Introductions

Have your materials ready prior to participants' arrival. Set up either five chart stands or hang five large sheets of paper (butcher paper would work) around the room. Use the headers provided to label the pages. Put out Post-it notes and/or index cards, pens, pencils and markers on the tables.

Opening Activity

After welcoming all of the participants, introduce and play *The Power of Partnerships* DVD.

Ask participants to reflect for a minute on the chapter they just watched. Have them share some of the main ideas they heard from Dr. Mapp's presentation. Discuss with the participants how some of those ideas might be applied at the school.

Activity 2 - Gallery Walk

Have participants number off 1 through 5. Invite each group to go to their corresponding chart paper with activity headers. Ask participants to brainstorm as many ideas for *Linking to Learning* as possible for the assigned topic (see below) and have them record their responses on the chart paper. Encourage groups to think about things they currently do as well as things that they could do to enhance current practices.

Give groups two minutes to generate ideas then ask each group to move to the next chart. At the next chart (and all subsequent charts), instruct participants to come up with new ideas to add to those already recorded. Continue the activity until every group has worked at each chart.

When participants are back at their original charts, give the groups four minutes to review all the ideas that are listed. Have them select three ideas that they would like to share out with the entire group, including why they chose the ideas and how they could implement them in the building or their classroom.

Linking To Learning Headers

- School and classroom newsletters
- Site Council and PTO meetings
- Open House
- Fundraisers and Family Nights
- Enrollment



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Optional Activity -*Linking to Learning Planning*

After finishing the Gallery Walk, explain to participants that they are going to have the opportunity to put on their “Coke and Pepsi” hats and revamp a current parent involvement practice in their classroom or in their individual position.

Have participants break into groups of 3 to 5. Each group selects a classroom or position level activity (from below) that they would like to try or improve.

- Personal communication with families
- Customer service
- Newsletters
- Sending information home
- Showcasing student work
- Building community connections
- Marketing the school and upcoming activities

The only requirements are that whatever they plan should be *Linked to Learning* and that they apply the *Joining Process*:

1. *Welcome parents into the school*
2. *Honor their participation*
3. *Connect with parents through a focus on the children and their learning.*

Give participants 10-15 minutes for their planning. After finishing, have them share what they planned. Allow time for discussion, if necessary.

Conclusion and Reflection

Give participants a few minutes to privately record their thoughts on the reflection form. Ask participants, one at a time, to stand up and share one statement from their reflection. Another person links on by stating how he/she is similar and links arms with the previous person. The linking continues until all participants are “linked up.” After everybody has shared, thank them for coming!

Note to Facilitators: Take a moment to write down what worked well for you, what you might change and any key points you want to refer back to during your next training.

School and Classroom Newsletters

Site Council and PTO Meetings

Open House

Enrollment

Fundraisers and Family Nights

Linking to Learning Reflection

What I've learned about linking Parent Involvement to learning is...

In the past, I have linked Parent Involvement to learning by...

As a result of today's learning session, I will...