Indicator: The school uses Open House as an opportunity to convey to parents that what goes on at home impacts student's academic performance.

Evidence Review:

> The particular family behaviors that contribute to school learning can be neatly summarized; they surround the activities of reading (including parent-child discussion of reading), parent-child discussions of school and learning, homework and other study at home, and expectations, structures and routines regarding work, punctuality, and daily living (Davé, 1963). For some families, these behaviors come naturally; for others, they may be learned and adopted. The school, properly perceived as a community, can take the lead in making clear the kind of home environment that best supports school learning and providing support for parents who wish to align their family life with these behavioral correlates with school success. (Redding, 2001, p. 11).

The Open House (or "Back-to-School Night") and other events such as parent–teacher–student conferences are typical points of contact between parents and school personnel. It provides a prime opportunity to convey to each child's family how important their role is in their child's education (ADI, 2011; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2010; Redding, 2000, 2006). Make sure parents are invited in their home languages and translators are available. School staff can emphasize—in practical, jargon-free language—the simple but profound actions parents can take to support their children's academic, social, and emotional growth (CII, 2011; Patrikakou, Weissberg, Redding, & Walberg, 2005). These include holding high expectations for children, communication, and a parenting style that combines strong expressions of love and support with a beneficial degree of discipline and structure (Jeynes, 2010, 2011), as well as establishing routines of family life that prioritize reading and study habits and frequent communication with teachers (Redding, 2000, 2006; Walberg, 2011).

The Open House also provides an opportunity to share with family and community members about parent/family programs, upcoming all-school events, communication channels that are available between school and home, and key documents such as the compact, homework policy, learning standards, and classroom visit policy (ADI, 2011; Redding 2006). It is vital that school staff are encouraging and supportive toward parents, welcoming them, respecting family strengths (CII, 2011; Jeynes, 2011), showing a genuine concern for each child and enthusiasm for teaching (Church & Dollins, 2010). Church and Dollins suggest the teacher introducing himself or herself with both first and last name, and possibly display a few personal mementos, to show a desire to develop a collegial relationship with parents, rather than an authoritative one, along with providing contact information and a list of ways parents might get involved in the classroom. Parents who want to check on their child's progress should be invited to write down their contact information so a conference can be arranged at another time (Church & Dollins, 2010).

Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies (2007) recommend using the Open House or a Back-to-School Night as an opportunity for a class meeting:

> Class meetings allow time for teachers and parents to learn from each other.…Instead of discussing rules of behavior or filling out emergency forms,

> talk about your approach to teaching and ask families to brainstorm ways they can support their kids. Encourage discussions. Nuts-and-bolts information, such as class schedules and school supply lists, can be covered in handouts. Use the time to build relationships.
>
> Class meetings that follow can cover specific subjects and raise expectations. Consider devoting one meeting each to showing how you teach reading, writing, and math. Explain an assignment and give parents their students' work. What standard did the assignment address? Show them the scoring guide you used and ask them to assess the work using the guide. Welcome hard questions: "What does this standard mean? How does this assignment reflect that standard? How do grades relate to standards?" Then talk about how parents can use scoring guides to discuss student work at home. (p. 87)

Jeynes 2012 meta-analysis of parent programs found statistically significant, positive effects on student outcomes for those emphasizing parental involvement including shared reading, teacher–parent partnership, checking homework, or teacher–parent communication, some including greater effects for school-based programs compared to voluntary parent actions (Jeynes, 2013):

> For example, the effects for shared reading programs were greater in school-based programs than in voluntary expressions of parental involvement. In this case, the benefit of parents' receiving guidance from teachers about reading strategies, book selection, and so forth may have enhanced the benefit of parent–child shared reading practices. This "teacher effect" may have helped the shared reading experience be more efficient and productive than reading activities undertaken by parents on their own, without reading strategy prompts.

Open House may provide an opportunity for teachers to promote such programs and provide prompts, explanations, and/or materials to parents. One study in schools with a majority of low-income families found that student performance in math and reading improved at a 40–50% high rate when teachers reached out to parents in these three ways:

- Met face-to-face with each family at the beginning of the school year
- Sent families materials each week on ways to help their children at home
- Telephoned routinely with news on how the children were doing, not just when they were having problems or acting up (Westat & Policy Studies Assoc., 2002)

Studies of homework that included an interactive element requiring children to talk with someone at home about the assignment have shown a variety of significant, positive outcomes, including improved student skills, increased parent involvement, and better teacher attitudes (Bennett-Conroy, 2012; Epstein, Simon, & Salinas, 1997; Van Voorhis, 2003). Open House, again, may be a great time to launch such a program.

Teachers and other school staff may need professional development (Dotger & Bennett, 2010) regarding the "curriculum of the home"—the bundle of attitudes, habits, knowledge, and skills that children acquire through their relationship with their family and that facilitates their school learning—which is more predictive of academic learning than the family's socioeconomic status (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001; Redding, 2000, 2006). Teacher training is even more essential when the teacher and the students' families have different home cultures. The Bridging Cultures Project used in-service training and action research to help a cadre of teachers learn about collectivistic cultures vs. individualistic cultures (Trumbull Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2001; Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, & Hernandez, 2003). Though the project aimed to promote more effective instruction, the teachers found that it also greatly facilitated improved communication and partnerships with their students' families. Kugler (2012) notes that something as basic as eye contact can easily be misinterpreted by those from different cultures—school

personnel born and raised in the U.S. expect to have eye contact during conversation as a basic sign of attention and respect from the listener. However, for many people in other cultures, the opposite is true—looking away or down shows respect and deference to the speaker. Similarly, wording can be easily misinterpreted: offering a workshop or tip sheet on "parenting" may insult families ("They think we're not doing a good job! I don't want someone telling my how to raise *my* kids" Henderson et al., 2007, p. 83). Instead, offer suggestions for maximizing learning outside of school, and invite the families to suggest specific topics of interest. Teacher training can bring awareness of the deficit view many hold toward parents of poverty, language difference, or low education by showing how to recognize and build on families' strengths and funds of knowledge (Chen, Kyle, & McIntyre, 2008; Moll & González, 2004). "When school staff have a better understanding of their students' home cultures, families' parenting practices, home contexts, home crises, or significant family and community events, they can develop processes and strategies to bridge school-based and home-based activities and increase support for student learning" (Ferguson, 2008, p. 14).

If another Open House is held toward the end of the school year, it can be used as an opportunity to celebrate the students' learning throughout the year, showcasing work portfolios, projects, books read, and more (Church & Dollins, 2010). The families' role and contribution to this success should be highlighted and celebrated, as well. "Open House is a success when families can readily see how each child has developed as a learner" (Church & Dollins, 2010, p. 84).

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Building Block: Connection

Indicator: Parent-teacher conferences are held at least twice a year and include students at least once a year.

Evidence Review:

Parent–teacher–student conferences can be a very effective means of two-way communication; they can also be a source of stress if teachers are unprepared for communicating with students' families (Graham-Clay, 2005). Districts and schools should make sure teachers are prepared to maximize this time, since it is often their only chance to meet face-to-face with their students' family members (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007). Conferencing twice a year is considered a minimum for effective school–home relationships (ADI, 2011). They should always begin with a friendly welcome and positive comments about the student (Henderson et al., 2007; Jeynes, 2010) and will go more smoothly if the teacher has already reached out to families with positive contacts early in the school year (PTA, 2009; Ramirez, 2002). For a truly successful school, it is vital that school personnel and parents build relationships based on trust and mutual respect (Redding, 2006).

Preparing teachers adequately for conferences and for communicating effectively with families often means providing professional development to augment preservice training (Shumow & Harris, 2000; Symeou, Roussounidou, & Michaelides, 2012). Extra training is also required when teachers and families do not share a cultural heritage or similar socioeconomic background (Chen, Kyle, & McIntyre, 2008; Eberly, Joshi, & Konzal, 2007; Kyle, McIntyre, Miller, & Moore, 2005; Moll & González, 2004). One study found that Arab mothers who attended conferences were nodding, which teachers took as a sign that the mothers understood and agreed to their requests; however, the mothers were merely showing respect and not necessarily agreement (Moosa, Karabenick, & Adams, 2001). Kugler (2012) also reports that some teachers have been offended by parents who did not maintain eye contact with them during con-versations; however, these parents were also showing respect (in accordance with their own cultural norms and practices). Schools should also ensure that bilingual professionals or translation services are readily available to parents who are not comfortable communicating in English and that they advertise the availability of these services to parents who may not know they exist (Vera et al., 2012). Teachers may also need to be creative and flexible about the timing of conferences to accommodate parents working schedules (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, & Hernandez, 2003).

After studying about individualism vs. collectivist frameworks through the Bridging Cultures Project (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2001; Trumbull et al., 2003), one teacher (whose students were nearly all from immigrant Latino families) decided to try a small group conference instead of individual conferences:

> In Ms. Altchech's new version of the conference, small groups of five to eight parents meet at a time, with their children present. Ms. Altchech spends the first few minutes explaining things all parents need to know about testing, the report card, etc. She talks about what she is doing to help students progress and makes suggestions to parents about how they can help at home. Ms. Altchech says she believes the parents have been empowered by the group conference process:

> Some of the parents are more actively involved in conferences now. Now they will ask questions, not just about behavior, but about how they can help their child. [I see] a change in the parents' role. That is the most evident change. (Trumbull et al., 2003, p. 58)

After Ms. Altchech's experiment, other teachers in the Bridging Cultures project also tried group con-ferencing. They report great success, noting it helps to create a feeling of family and allows parents to get to know one another. Individual conferences are also offered if parents prefer (Trumbull et al., 2003).

Many researchers and practitioners recommend including students in conferences (ADI, 2011; Henderson et al., 2007; Hiatt-Michael, 2010; Tuinstra & Hiatt-Michael, 2003).

> Even though it's called a parent-teacher conference, the meeting is all about the student. Why should the central person be excluded? Students do better in school when they feel in charge and accountable for the quality of their work. Even in elementary school, students can benefit from being at the conference. In middle and high school, it is essential. (Henderson et al., p. 100)

Some schools go a step further and utilize student-led conferences. This type of conference shifts the responsibility from the teacher to the student, with the student preparing in advance (guided by the teacher), leading the discussion, showing a portfolio demonstrating his or her work, and asking questions of the parent(s) and teacher (ADI, 2011; Henderson et al., 2007; Kinney, 2005). A study by Tuinstra and Hiatt-Michael (2003) showed this to be an effective part of reform efforts in middle schools across four states, with students, teachers, parents, and administrators reporting that students showed more responsibility and improved their grades; parental participation in conferences also increased.

Another variation of the parent–teacher conference is the open door conference, a designated time when teachers are available for walk-in meetings (Redding, 2000). For example, some schools set aside thirty minutes before school on a designated day each week when all teachers are available to parents.

Parents can also be better prepared for conferences if teachers send home, in advance, tip sheets [e.g., *Helpful tips for parents: Preparing for a parent–teacher–student conference* (also available in Spanish) from http://www.schoolcommunitynetwork.org/English.aspx] and samples of student work with explanations of the task and any accommodations or assistance the student received (Graham-Clay, 2005). Other best practices and tips are presented in the following examples.

Example from ADI, 2011:

Principles for Effective Conferences

- The conferences are held at least twice a year;
- The conference follows a standard agenda that all teachers and parents know about in advance;
- The conference includes a discussion of the School Community Compact, homework policy, and learning standards;
- Each conference concludes with agreed upon Next Steps for the parent(s), teacher, and student;
- A file of "Next Steps" is kept that passes from conference to conference, teacher to teacher.

Parent–teacher–student conferences are always a good time to encourage parents to participate in courses offered for them by the school and in other key parent activities.

Example from Henderson, et al., 2007, p. 99–100

A middle school principal offers this advice: Give parents workshops about asking good questions at conferences and meetings with teachers. Have them practice and do role-plays. They should not be asking "How is my child behaving?" but "At what level is he reading?"

"Next, they should ask: 'Show me level-four work so I can compare it to my child's work.' Questions focused on academics—this is what's going to drive better instruction at the school."

Develop an education checkup card for parents to bring with them. List questions that parents can ask (and—just as important—questions that teachers are expecting):

- Is my child performing at a proficient level (up to standard) in basic skills? If not, is my child above or below? (If it's below, ask: What is your plan for helping my child catch up? How can I help?)
- What do my child's test scores show? What are his/her strengths and weaknesses?
- Can we go over some examples of my child's work? Will you explain your grading standards?
- Does my child need extra help in any area (including adjusting to school)? What do you recommend? How can we work together to help my child?
- Does my child do all the assigned work, including homework?
- Does my child seem to like school and get along with classmates?
- Have you noticed any changes in my child over the year?

Example from Henderson, et al., 2007, pp. 293–294

This checklist was developed by Melissa Whipple, the coordinator of the Parent Academic Liaison (PAL) program in San Diego, as a tool to help teachers prepare for conferences with families.

Before the conference

___ 1. **Notify parents and students about:**
- Purpose
- Place, time, length of time
- Child care arrangements
- Parent planning sheet (questions to ask)

___ 2. **Prepare:**
- Review student's folder
- Gather samples of work
- Gather input from students
- Prepare materials
- Think about what to say; avoid "educationese"

___ 3. **Plan agenda:**
- Draw up a plan for the conference
- Emphasize cooperation—what can both sides do?

___ 4. **Arrange environment:**

- Plan seating away from the desk
- Make sure there will be privacy
- See that things look welcoming and comfortable

During the conference

1. **Welcome.** Establish rapport.
2. **Set terms.** State the purpose, mention any time limits, encourage note taking, and mention options for follow-up.
3. **Lead with the positive.** Share what you see as the child's major strengths and unique qualities.
4. **Encourage.** Share information ("What do you think your child does well?") and invite comments and questions ("Do you have any questions for me?").
5. **Show.** Point out areas where there has been academic and social growth.
6. **Listen.** Pause and restate parents' words; look for verbal and nonverbal clues; invite questions.
7. **Develop an action plan.** Choose one or two areas on which to focus.
8. **Summarize.** Review the conversation and plan follow-up to check progress on the action plan.
9. **End on a positive note.** Express confidence in the child's ability to be a successful learner.

After the conference

___ 1. **Review** the conference with the child.
___ 2. **Share information** with other school staff, if needed.
___ 3. **Put it in writing**—send a follow-up note or letter.
___ 4. **Mark calendar** for planned follow-up.

Student-led Conferences Resources:

Student-Led Conferences (video)

School Tube

Watch a video describing student-led conferences and what this high school asked students to include in their portfolios; it also shows an example of an actual conference.

A Guide to Student-Led Conferences

Edudemic Staff

This article details a few ways to hold effective student-led conferences and offers a guide for each conference participant, looking at parent roles, teacher roles, and students as conference leaders.

In Charge: Student-Led Conferences at Pittsfield Middle High School (video)

Mallozi, J.

"A small rural school in southern New Hampshire is undergoing major school change towards more student-centered learning. This video showcases their work with Student-Led Conferences, in which high school students prepare a portfolio of work and lead a presentation with their parents, advisor, and invited guest. Attendance at the conferences is far higher than [previously]."

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Building Block: Connection

Indicator: All staff, including office and support staff, are trained to make the school a "welcoming place" for parents.

Evidence Review:

"Communication may involve impressions created or words expressed…. A 'customer-friendly' school environment reflects how highly communication with parents is valued by school staff" (Graham-Clay, 2005, p. 118). A positive school climate is crucial for schools to be successful. Students' family members and other concerned community members often have their first contact within the school not with a principal or teacher, but with other school staff. It is vital that the importance of creating a welcoming atmosphere be part of induction and training for every school employee and volunteer. "Parents report that a welcoming process creates a sense of belonging" which, in turn, "motivates parents to be more active in their children's schooling" (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007, p. 50). To help accomplish this goal, the Solid Foundation® Resource Manual (ADI, 2011) recommends: "All staff—including teachers, teachers' aides, clerks, custodians, cooks, and others—greet visitors in the hallway in a pleasant and helpful manner to solicit their needs and to direct them to the office. Office staff greet visitors promptly, cheerfully, and helpfully." Likewise, telephones are answered by staff who are pleasant and helpful. If the visitor doesn't speak English well, staff quickly find someone who can interpret (Henderson et al., 2007).

> Even before families enter the school, they look for reassurance that they will be welcomed when they step through the door. Here are some signals:

- Friendly signs (in all major languages spoken by your families) point out the entrance and say that families and visitors are welcome.
- Parking sports for parents and visitors are clearly marked and are near (or at least not very far from) the entrance.
- School staff and parents greet visitors in a friendly way and ask if they can help.
- Teachers, administrators, and other school staff go outside the building to greet and talk with parents. (Henderson et al., 2007, p. 50)

In examining recent research, Jeynes found that, for schools to foster better parental involvement in education, "whether teachers, principals, and school staff are loving, encouraging, and supportive to parents may be more important than the specific guidelines and tutelage they offer to parents" (2011, pp. 10-11). A welcoming climate and positive communication is even more vital for families of populations considered "at-risk," such as English learners, the economically disadvantaged, and those with disabilities (Jeynes, 2010; Lo, 2008; St. Clair & Jackson, 2006; Vera et al., 2012).

A sense of community within a school must be carefully and intentionally built by making every member feel welcomed and honored and ensuring all are connected to the purpose of promoting student learning (Redding, 2011). This begins with a clear expectation that all school staff will address students, parents, and one another respectfully (ADI, 2011).

Example from Constantino, 2003, as cited in Henderson et al., 2007, p. 52:

"The Counter"

Steven Constantino, a former principal, tells this story about his first day as a high school principal in Virginia:

Walking into the front office, the new principal noticed the worn carpet, mismatched plastic chairs, and the clocks that told the wrong time. Then there was *the counter*. There is stood, fifteen feet long and four feet high, covered with peeling laminate, a man-made barrier between the school and those who dared to enter. Behind the counter were the tops of two heads. After a few minutes, he coughed. No luck.

Finally, he said, "Good morning." The secretary closest to him looked up and said, "Yes?" (He later learned that it was her job to greet people.)

"I'm the new principal."

"Oh, your office is over there." She pointed and went back to work.

The message? *Welcome to our broken-down school where we hope we will make you feel as though you are imposing on us. Please take a seat in the mismatched uncomfortable plastic chairs while we decide if we are going to help you or not*.

That afternoon, the counter was taken down, forever.

Example from Ellis and Hughes, 2002, p. 46:

Support Staff Roles and Responsibilities

Much of a school's support staff is considered the "front-line staff " when it comes to partnership activities. The front-office staff are the first ones seen by visitors. The bus drivers pick up students near their homes and often meet family members. The cafeteria workers, janitors, playground monitors, school social worker, guidance counselor, nurse, and National Service members (AmeriCorps, VISTA, Senior Corps, and Learn and Serve) are often familiar with students in ways that the teachers never see.

Below is a list of responsibilities that are critical in increasing student achievement and nurturing effective school–family–community partnerships. Review the list and rank how these are being done within your school. At the end of the prepared list is a place for you to include other responsibilities that you feel are important for support staff to perform.

O	S	A	O = Do Often, S = Do Some of the Time, A = Do a Little, Almost Never
			"Front-line staff " are included in training regarding school–family–community partnerships.
			"Front-line staff " are trained with teachers and administrators to work with family and community members.
			A plan has been developed as to how "front-line staff " will work with family and community members.
			Front-office staff greet visitors warmly when they enter the main office (for instance, staff seem pleased to see them, smile, and use a pleasant tone of voice).
			Front-office staff greet visitors individually when they arrive (for instance, saying hello, calling them by name, and introducing themselves).

			Office staff have set up a system to get phone messages to teachers including when to send phone calls to the teacher's classroom, when to offer to take a message, when to give the caller information about times to call back and talk to the teacher, etc.
			Other:
			Other:
			Other:

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Building Block: Connection

Indicator: All-school events (e.g., family reading night or math night) include parent–child interactive activities.

Evidence Review:

In a meta-analysis of research on family involvement, Henderson and Mapp (2002) found that family involvement and outreach is most effective when it is linked to students' learning. Comprehensive family engagement efforts with multiple points of contact, invitations for involvement, and readily available supports have been shown to improve student achievement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Henderson Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007; Redding, 2006, 2011; Redding, Langdon, Meyer, & Sheley, 2004). According to Redding (2006), association, or "face-to-face connection among members of the school community" (p. 161), provides an opportunity not only for parents and teachers to meet, but also for parents to get to know other parents and for everyone to strengthen their understanding of the school community's purpose and their role in fulfilling that purpose. All school events such as family nights are one way to facilitate connection.

Church and Dollins (2010) elaborate:

> Family Nights can be an entertaining and powerful way to engage parents as partners in their child's education, establishing equity between parents, teachers, and other staff members (Seefeldt & Goldsmith, 1998)….Family Nights can serve to inform parents about what their child is learning and, additionally, offer these same parents an opportunity to expand their knowledge about the curriculum that takes place in the classroom so that they can better support their child at home. The venue is such that parents can actually learn side by side with their child. By participating in Family Nights, parents show their children that they are interested in what the students are learning and that they value education. As schools welcome parents, educators send a clear message that they understand the extremely important role parents play in their child's life. (p. 79)

Family nights can involve the whole school or be focused on or hosted by one grade level or classroom (ADI, 2011; Church & Dollins, 2010). They do not have to be in the evening, either—some schools have had success in holding such events right after school, when parents normally pick up their children (Church & Dollins, 2010). They can be focused on a part of the curriculum, such as reading/ literacy or math or science, or on a particular theme; they can be used effectively for elementary, middle, or high schools with appropriate planning and creativity. Students can be involved in preparing and presenting various aspects of the evening. Inviting younger siblings shows that schools value the family unit (Seefeldt & Goldsmith, 1998). Providing an opportunity for parents to interact with their children is a key component (Redding, 2006).

Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, and Davies (2007) suggest this general sequence of activities:

- Explain what skills students are learning in class.
- Demonstrate a learning activity for parents and explain how the activity will develop those skills. Ask parents to act out the parts.
- Give materials to each family, offering advice as they use them.
- Help parents assess children's progress on the activity and steer children to the next steps.
- Lend materials to use at home. (p. 97)

Example:

Family Reading Night Ideas

- Theme Based – Select a theme and plan the evening events on that one idea.
- Classroom host the event – Select different grade levels or classrooms to host the Family Night.
- Storyteller Drama – Invite a local drama group (either high school or college) to act out the plot of a children's book.
- Author Night – Invite a local children's book writer to the program or focus the event on the work of one author.
- Host Readers – Invite local community leaders to read a story. Have several community leaders, and each one can read to a classroom.
- Sponsorships – Invite corporate or local businesses to sponsor the event. Have door prizes available for children and adults who attend.
- Book Fairs/Book Clubs – Tie the event to book fairs and/or book clubs that are visiting your school.
- Make and Take a Book – Have the children create their own books by creating the illustrations and story plot.
- Kick Off Reading Challenge – Use the Family Reading Night to launch a reading challenge between students or grade levels. Another challenge could be to have the students read a set number of books, and a faculty member will do something funny such as get a pie in the face.
- Book Character Visits – Take characters from a popular book; have them visit your reading night.
- Puppet Show – Provide a puppet show based on a book. (ADI, 2011)

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Indicator: The school maintains a program of home visits by teachers, staff, and/or trained community members.

Evidence Review:

> A lot of home–school communication is limited to one-way notices and newsletters. Home visits can gain parents' trust, build rapport between families and school, and provide information about how the school works. If parents are reluctant to come to school, a home visit can be a critical link, and often leads to more participation at home and at school. (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007, p. 67)

A home visit is when someone representing the school visits a student's home. When teachers visit their students' homes, they have a unique opportunity for private, face-to-face communication with the student's family (Hiatt-Michael, 2010). Home visits may also be conducted by others—parents, principals, school counselors, community members, teacher aides, family advocates—trained for the job (Henderson et al., 2007; Redding, 2006). Home visits enable a school to reach parents, especially those who might not come to school, with a welcoming message, informational and learning materials, and helpful advice (ADI, 2011). Visitors should remember that "listening to the parents is paramount" (Redding, 2011, p. 19). Home visiting programs can result in increased academic achievement, improved attendance and homework completion, increased parental involvement, improved student and parent attitudes about school, and reduced suspension and expulsion rates (Henke, 2011; Priority Schools Campaign, 2011).

The visit should be conversational, with a "get-to-know-you" feel (Redding, 2006). One teacher described her approach this way:

> Over 50 percent of the time, I meet families in their homes, but sometimes they're not ready for that, so we meet at a park or coffee shop. First visits always seem more formal. A big part is affirming the parent as the first teacher. I always ask if there is anything they want me to keep an eye on. Every one of us at school does a home visit in the summer and a second one later in the year. One of my favorite things is watching the parents' faces soften as they realize this is a real conversation. They relax and speak naturally. (Henke, 2011, p. 40)

Good organization is the key to a successful home visit. Home visitors must be trained and given a purpose for the visit (ADI, 2011; Redding, 2006, 2011). The administration might get the input of the School Community Council and/or parent groups to determine the group of students whose homes will be visited and to set up a system for tracking the results:

> For example, a school might decide to visit all second graders in the late spring and summer to boost summer reading. The children would be given books, and the parents would be given information to help them encourage their children's reading habits. The materials for the parents would also include a letter of greeting from the principal and information about parent activities at the school. Information about summer reading programs at the public library or recreation

> center might be included. A middle school might decide to visit the homes of incoming sixth graders the summer before they begin attending the school. The emphasis for these visits might be on study skills and homework habits. Again, a welcoming letter from the principal and information about the school and its activities for parents would be included. (ADI, 2011)

Training should be site-specific, typically including information on how to introduce yourself to the parent(s) or caregiver and schedule visits, entering the home in a culturally appropriate manner, explaining the purpose of the visit, how to ask questions and exchange information, and what resources to bring and leave with the family (Hiatt-Michael, 2010; Redding, 2011). Training on listening and communication skills is also very helpful and should include opportunities for role playing, practice, and reflection (Henke, 2011; Symeou, Roussounidou, & Michaelides, 2012). Some home visiting programs incorporate a pair of visitors to increase the visitors' comfort level in a potentially different culture (Hiatt-Michael, 2010). Studies report that the communication established during home visits help parents and teachers develop a sense of trust and bonding which promotes long-term, positive relationships (Aguerrebere, 2009; Henke, 2011). Visits give school staff members an "increased ability to put themselves in other people's shoes" (Henke, 2011, p. 40). This leads to a variety of improved outcomes for all involved, including, ultimately, the students.

In one unique, longitudinal research project, teachers made multiple home visits with a goal "to help students achieve academically by providing effective instruction that linked students' learning in school to their background of knowledge and experiences" (Kyle, McIntyre, Miller, & Moore, 2005, p. 29; see also Kyle, 2011; Moll & González, 2004). The research team found four themes in the teachers' reflections on the visits: "how they began to see the child as the parents did, the support parents provided for their children, the challenges and concerns families faced and shared, and how the families viewed their children's school experiences" (Kyle et al., 2005, p. 34). After this deeply engaged work, the authors offer this advice:

> We offer this caveat, however: We do not recommend family visits without structured time for reflection. Schools would be wise to allocate time for careful planning; much discussion ahead of time about purpose, assumptions, and strategies; and guided reflection time afterward. This approach is especially important as teachers first engage in this work. Our concern is that some teachers may come away from the family visits, especially visits with students of poverty, with a deficit view of students and an attitude that the students cannot learn much. Instead, teachers need to process what they observe with a skilled guide, one who can help them see strengths, discern funds of knowledge, and, if necessary, think more deeply about any tacit assumptions and biases that might be shaping their interpretations. (Kyle et al., 2005, p. 49)

While tight budgets can constrain home visiting, "creative administrators can allocate staff development time, faculty meeting time, or teacher planning time as opportunities for teachers to make home visits" (Hiatt-Michael, 2010, p. 43). Some districts have partnered with foundations or received grant monies to support home visiting programs (Henke, 2011).

Example from Henderson et al., 2007, p. 67:

Steps for Making a Home Visit

In elementary school, a home visit can proceed in this way:

1. Arrange a visit at a time convenient for the family, usually evenings or weekends.
2. Begin by asking parents to talk about their children's skills, talents, and interests.
3. Relate these abilities to skills students are learning at school. Discuss how chores and other family activities can be ways to build those skills.
4. Introduce short, simple learning activities. For example: using cooking recipes to teach reading, sequencing, and measuring; playing counting and spelling games; doing outdoor science projects.
5. Show how to work with the children, and then observe as parents practice with their children. Leave learning materials behind for families to use.

In middle school, children can serve as hosts for home visits. They meet with teachers before the visit and discuss what kinds of assistance they would like. The home visit can include information about tutoring; special programs in math, science, or other subjects at local museums or colleges; and family activities to improve skills. In any home visit, the focus should always be on helping children to succeed in school.

Example from Priority Schools Campaign, 2011, p. 16, pp. 39–40:

The Parent–Teacher Home Visit Program (PTHVP), based in Sacramento, California, trains teachers to make home visits to families that will build relationships and foster parent–teacher collaboration focused on improving student achievement. Participation is voluntary, and teachers are paid for their time.

At the elementary school level, home visits take place in the fall and spring. At the end of the first visit, teachers invite the family to come to the school and they develop a plan to communicate throughout the year. The second visit occurs just before spring testing. In middle and high school, teachers visit the homes of students in the seventh, ninth, and tenth grades, and the focus is on key transitions. The second home visit takes place in eleventh and twelfth grades and focuses on timely graduation and career or college planning. Evaluations have found that the visits lead to increased student attendance, improved test scores, and reduced suspension and expulsion rates.

Middle school teacher Tarik McFall made a home visit in which the mother told him that she hoped her son, DeJanerio, would do well in school and go to college. The son heard what his mother said. "I think hearing her say those words to his teacher really influenced him to do well in school. For the rest of the year, DeJanerio really evolved into an excellent leader and even scored 'proficient' in math on the CST!"

Teachers visit K–12 families with two main goals:

1. To build connection and trust by listening to families and understanding their expertise and strengths
2. To share information about the child's academic status and offer tools for parents to work with students at home.

Agreeing on core values: The PTHVP partners took time at the outset to reach agreement on their attitudes and beliefs. They identified the following core values:

- Families and teachers are equally important coeducators. The family is the expert on the child, and the teacher is the expert on the curriculum the child needs to master to be successful.

- Before teachers can effectively share important information about academic status, teachers and parents must establish positive communication and address any communication barriers.
- Teachers must visit all students and families because only targeting challenging students will perpetuate the cycle of mistrust.
- All parents can assist in their children's academic success; effective family involvement can happen in every home.
- Participation in the project should be voluntary, and teachers receive compensation for their time.

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Building Block: Connection

Indicator: The school maintains a program of home gatherings, with groups of parents meeting in a home with a teacher.

Evidence Review:

The curriculum of the home "does not consist of subject matter but of patterns of habit formation and attitude development that prepare a child for academic learning and sustain the child through the years of schooling….For some families, these behaviors come naturally; for others, they may be learned and adopted" (Redding, 2001, pp. 10–11). The curriculum of the home is more predictive of academic learning than the family's socioeconomic status (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001; Redding, 2000, 2006). This includes monitoring homework, of course, but also includes many other aspects of home life that are important for school adjustment that teachers may or may not recognize as parental involvement (Ferrara, 2009). Even parents who rarely or never come to the school are often deeply involved with their children at home (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Shumow, 2010). In a series of meta-analyses, Jeynes found that subtle aspects of parental involvement—such as expectations and parenting style—were actually the most salient to children's achievement (Jeynes, 2010, 2011).

It is also beneficial for parents to have opportunities to meet other parents. The school can consider how and when it can facilitate chances for parents to get to know the families of their child's classmates.

> When the families of children in a school associate with one another, social capital is increased, children are watched over by a larger number of caring adults, and parents share standards, norms, and the experiences of child-rearing. (Redding, 2000, p. 27)

Opportunities for parental interactions might include home gatherings (see the Example below for details about home gatherings), class meetings at the school (see Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007), parent workshops (see, e.g., O'Donnell, Kirkner, & Meyer-Adams, 2008), parent centers (Johnson, 2001), or small group conferences (see Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, & Hernandez, 2003).

Example from Redding, 2006, p. 159–160:

"What we have here is a failure to communicate," said the prison guard in the movie Cool Hand Luke. How often do we say the same in schools? Clear communication requires more than the opportunity to communicate, it also requires an agreement on the topics for discussion. Communication between the school and the home includes five essential topics: 1) what parents can expect from the school—its programs, curriculum, activities, procedures, and policies; 2) what the school can expect from parents—the curriculum of the home; 3) how the parents' child is progressing; 4) how the school can help the parents; and 5) how the parents can help the school. Typically, schools are good at providing information about their programs and some indication of how the child is progressing. The school probably provides some avenues for two-way communication about these two topics. A greater challenge lies in giving due attention to what the school should expect from parents, how the school can help parents in their role, and how parents can help the school in its role. Also, most schools need to work hard at creating opportunities for true communication, conversation, between parents and school personnel, and between parents and other parents. This requires outreach to parents, and it requires careful linkage between parent–child interactions and school learning.

Because opportunity for communication between the home and the school is limited if it only occurs when parents are at the school, the school must find avenues for outreach to the home.…

Home visits and home gatherings are forms of outreach that facilitate two-way communication and circumvent the complaint that some parents don't come to the school. A home visit is when someone representing the school visits a student's home. A home gathering is when parents

gather in one parent's home and someone representing the school is included. Home visits may be conducted by teachers or by others—parents, community members, teacher aides—trained for the job. At a home gathering, a teacher is the most effective "official" participant from the school….

Home gatherings require their own preparation and training for the host parents and the participating teachers. They meet as a group to develop an agenda for the gatherings and to plan the logistics. Each host parent develops a list of invitees. Teachers may suggest to the group parents who would especially benefit from a home gathering, but each host parent must be allowed to select his or her own invitee list. Ground rules are important. The gathering is not a time to discuss particular children or teachers, and the host parent and visiting teacher need to know how to divert conversations that drift in that direction. The home gathering is a good time to talk about the roles of parents and of teachers, in general, in supporting the purpose of the school. The discussion is led by the host parent. The mood is informal, with a handful of parents, a pot of coffee, a few cookies, and an agenda that guides their conversation. Once a round of home gatherings has taken place, the host parents and teachers meet again to discuss their experience.

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Building Block: Connection

Indicator: The school provides room for parents to meet.

Evidence Review:

Providing a warm, welcoming space dedicated to students' families and creatively encouraging its use communicates to parents the value they hold in the school community and can strengthen the social capital available to the families and, ultimately, the students (ADI, 2011; Johnson, 2001). Providing a designated space "takes family–school–community partnership off the margins of school life and brings it into the daily life of the schools…families…are clearly expected at any time" (Johnson, 2001, p. 89). A parent resource center (which might have a variety of names, such as family center, adult learning center, parent room, etc.) can provide a place that offers opportunities for parents to expand their parenting skills, serve as a space to facilitate parent-to-parent and parent-to-school staff interactions and discussions about common parenting concerns, offer a resource library and information connecting parents to available community resources, provide a hub for volunteer opportunities, and serve as a meeting place for parent groups and school teams that include parents (ADI, 2011; Church & Dollins, 2010; Johnson, 2001). It can house both informal gatherings and planned events.

Church and Dollins (2010) suggest that a parent center may be more likely to succeed if it is parent-led, with the parent leaders working in collaboration with school staff. Within their designated space, families can "make decisions about furnishings, activities, hours, and procedures" (Johnson, 2001, p. 89). A contact person or coordinator should be responsible for the space and coordination of activities (Church & Dollins, 2010); if possible, paying this person provides stability and status for this demanding position (Johnson, 2001). The center's efforts should be developmentally specific—for example, a middle school parent center might help connect students with community service opportunities or specific interests, while high school parent centers may focus on college and career preparedness (Church & Dollins, 2010). Centers may also provide materials and outreach to specific groups at various times, such as families of preschoolers preparing for kindergarten, children with special needs, English learners, new immigrants, and so on.

When space is limited, some schools have designated a shared space for storage of materials and called it the Parent Room, even a space shared with the custodian or the physical education equipment, and then provided shared spaces to meet in, such as the library or a temporarily empty classroom. Other creative solutions include a mobile Parent Center in San Diego made from a bus retrofitted with tables, chairs, and materials in a variety of languages, travelling throughout the city for scheduled parent programs held in school parking areas (Johnson, 2001). Funding also requires creativity, with many centers using a combination of donations from business partners and/or foundations, school funds, Title I funds, and fundraising activities in or on behalf of the center. Materials, books, and equipment are also often donated by various groups. Whatever it takes to run one, a family center can provide great results:

> When a space is designated, families are no longer simply invited guests in schools. They are sometimes hosts, who reach out to other families and "reach in" to invite teachers, other school staff, and community participants to join them in a wide range of programs in support of children's development. By structuring

families into schools, educators symbolically change their status from outsiders to insiders. (Johnson, 2001, p. 89)

Example from Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007, p. 72:

Steps for Starting a Family Center

1. Find out what your community wants in a family center.
    - Welcome the entire school community to take part.
    - Conduct a needs assessment and map the resources in the school community.
    - Distribute the results to everyone in the school community.
2. Based on the results, develop a plan.
    - Invite everyone to meet to plan a Family Center.
    - Determine goals, tasks, and a time line.
    - Report progress regularly and share ideas frequently.
3. Celebrate the opening and keep planning.
    - Be sure everyone is included when the Family Center opens.
    - Consistently invite participation to create and maintain supportive strategies for the Family Center.

Example from ADI, 2011:

In planning the content of your resource center it is helpful to survey parents to determine what types of support they feel is needed to become better partners in the education of their child. Build the content of your resource center around the expressed needs of the parents. Suggested items for your resource center are listed:

- Books on parenting
- Materials for parents to establish good study habits
- Parent-friendly version of state learning standards
- Storybooks for reading to children
- Educational family activities and games
- Materials and activities for parents with preschool children

Other items for consideration might include:

- Magazine racks with parenting periodicals
- Coffeemaker
- Education area rug
- Stereo system
- Microphone
- CDs and/or videos (e.g., educational, relaxation, classical)
- Puppets
- Book baskets
- Resources to help parents cope (Stressbusters, etc.)
- Cookbooks and meal plans

- Children's recipes/ Holiday recipes
- Desk, chairs, tables
- Coat rack
- Storage for personal belongings
- Games
- Computer(s)
- Projection unit
- Conference table(s)
- Chalk board/dry erase/chart paper and marking instruments
- Bright pictures and posters

Parent resource materials can be donated, purchased, or made. Seek contributions for your center from businesses, publishers, book stores, and libraries. In selecting materials for your resource center, be sensitive to the religious and cultural make up of your school. Provide materials in more than one language if needed. Consider selecting materials that discuss the specific cultures and religions that make up your school community. Such materials will offer an opportunity for families outside of these groups to gain information about these cultural diversities.

Perhaps the biggest challenge in establishing a parent resource center is generating parental interest and inspiring parents to use it. Spotlighting the center during open house, at conferences, in newsletters, on bulletin boards, and the school website would do much to elevate awareness. To motivate parents to use the center, your school might offer movie rental coupons or free admission to a family fun park for each family that checks out materials, uses the internet, or physically visits during a given month.

If your space allows for trainings and workshops, take the following into consideration in planning your events:

- Offer your trainings at different times and days to accommodate most work schedules
- Provide child care
- Coordinate transportation

References and other resources:

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Johnson, V. (2001). Family centers in schools: Expanding possibilities for partnerships. In D. B. Hiatt-Michael (Ed.), *Promising practices for family involvement in schools* (pp. 85–106). Greenwich, CT: Information Age.