

**Obion County Schools
Family and Community Engagement Plan**

2008-2009

Obion County Schools Family and Community Engagement Plan

Culture Statement: The Obion County Board of Education strives to maintain good family/community involvement in the school system by keeping citizens informed about policies/procedures, involving citizens in planning, encouraging parents/community members to visit our schools, and promoting our system in the media.

Purpose: The Obion County School System developed the Family and Community Engagement Plan for the following reasons:

- To fulfill Tennessee Department of Education policy
- To create a common vision to increase student achievement and success by involving family and community in the education process
- To set guidelines for all schools in the district
- To increase family involvement
- To encourage individual schools to make a concerted effort to involve family and community on their campuses and in homes of students.

Leadership Committee:

- James Faulkner, chairperson, Assistant Director, Obion County Schools
- Dennis Buckelew, parent, principal of Lake Road Elementary School
- Mary Lynn Dodson, Director of Special Education, Obion County Schools
- Nancy Hamilton, Supervisor of Instruction, Obion County Schools
- Shannon Lyon, parent
- Lesa Scillion, Director of Federal Projects, Obion County Schools
- Vikki Stevenson, parent, Supervisor of Instruction, Obion County Schools
- Dale Hollowell, parent, Attendance Supervisor, Obion County Schools
- Lisa Vancleave, parent

Goals:

- To create a welcoming environment on each campus
- To improve parent involvement in student achievement
- To improve community communication and input into school system policies.

Process:

The formulation of this plan began in January 2005 when six members of the leadership team attended a two-day planning session conducted by Dr. Stephen Constantino in Nashville, Tennessee. Others attended follow-up sessions as the process continued. We surveyed parents from all schools. Our return rate on the surveys was as follows: Black Oak Elementary, 52 percent (158 of 302 surveys); Hillcrest Elementary, 49 percent (196 of 404 surveys); Lake Road Elementary, 69 percent (345 of 497 surveys); Obion County Central High School, 42 percent (135 of 319 surveys); Ridgmont Elementary, 66 percent (260 of 395 surveys); South Fulton Elementary, 83

percent (281 of 337 surveys); South Fulton Middle/High School, 62 percent (229 of 372 surveys). This is a total of 61 percent return of surveys system-wide. We made an effort not to send more than one survey home to a household. For example, we sent surveys home with the youngest child in a household; if a high school student had a younger sibling or siblings in school, only one survey was sent home with the youngest child. The survey asked parents/community members to respond to the following with these choices: strongly disagree, disagree, no opinion, agree, or strongly agree.

1. I find the school entrances welcoming and inviting.
2. I am treated courteously when I visit the school.
3. I believe the school to be safe.
4. Directional signs in the school make it easy for me to find my way around.
5. There is a comfortable reception area for families and guests.
6. The school has a parent/family center that I can use.
7. The school administrators are approachable and helpful.
8. Teachers are approachable and helpful.
9. If I need translation when I visit, it is available to me.
10. I have read the family involvement policy.
11. Training in educational issues is available to me.
12. I have good relationships with the staff at my child's school.
13. All neighborhoods are represented on the school council.
14. Non-school hours are used for family conferences with teachers.
15. Some school meetings are held in places other than the school.
16. I am welcome to visit school during the school day.
17. If I need a ride to a school event, the school provides it to me.
18. I have telephone numbers and e-mails for all teachers and staff.
19. It is easy to contact school teachers, administrators, and staff.
20. My child's teachers communicate with me often.
21. The school helps me understand what my child must learn.
22. I understand the state testing program and what my child must accomplish.
23. Grades and assignments are made available to me daily.
24. I am provided frequent information so I can help my child at home.
25. If I have a question about what my child is learning, I feel comfortable in asking it.
26. The school communicates with me in my native language.
27. I can easily find and read all school regulations and policies.
28. The school sends me a newsletter in my native language.
29. The school requires me to attend a conference about my child at least once a year.
30. I have input on school policies before they are enacted.
31. The school has a website that is current and updated.
32. I can be involved at my child's school in ways that are important to me.

Surveys revealed that the majority of our parents/community believes that the Obion County School System is "family friendly." We, of course, do have some areas that need to be improved. We are working on those areas.

Because the majority of our school population is white, we have very few language barriers with our parents. However, from the survey we have identified three areas that we think hinders parents of minority and economically disadvantaged students from attending parent-teacher conferences; they are language barriers of Hispanic parents (we have thirty-six Hispanic families in our school district), lack of child care for small children, and time restraints of working parents. In an effort to alleviate these burdens, we have made the following adjustments to our parent-teacher conference schedule: 1. We provide translation services at the two schools that have Hispanic students. 2. We provide childcare for parents who have to bring small children to the conference. 3. We staggered our parent-teacher conferences and lengthened the conferences to accommodate working parents. High school conferences are one day, and elementary conferences are the next working day so that parents who have children on more than one campus can attend both. Likewise we have lengthened each conference to six hours—noon to 6:00 p.m.—so that parents who work second shift as well as parents who work first shift can attend. All of these points were posted in the “NewsNotes” in the Daily Messenger before Parent-Teacher Conference. Both schools where our Hispanic students attend send home notes and newsletters translated in Spanish.

After sharing the results of the survey with our administrators and teachers, we set about the task of making improvements. We asked each principal to poll his teachers to determine how many and what kind of communications each teacher has with the parents of his/her students. We asked parents who volunteer in our school and parents on our leadership committee what further communications they would like from our schools. We have attempted to implement those suggestions. We will survey again near the end of the school year to see how well our improvements have been received. We constantly receive feedback from parents, both officially in the form of formal complaints and casually in conversations with parents at school functions and away from school. We make an attempt to address all comments.

We as a leadership team reviewed existing School Board policies that pertain to parent/community involvement in our schools. We found several: 4.5022 Parent/Family Involvement, 1.500 Board-Community Relations, 1.501 Visitors to the Schools, 3.206 Community Use of School Facilities, 4.500 Community Instructional Resources, 4.501 School Volunteers, 4.502 Parent/Family Involvement in Educational Programs, 4.5021 Parental Engagement, and 4.503 Parent Organizations/Booster Clubs. We reviewed these policies to determine whether or not any of these needed to be changed. After that review we submitted the following for Board approval:

Policy 4.5021—passed 10-03-05

It reads as follows:

Goals: The Obion County Schools will

1. Create a welcoming environment on each campus:

Strategies:

- Post welcome signs at main entrances.
- Personally invite parents of struggling students (those performing on a D or F level) to conferences.
- Communicate with parents in their home language.
- Conduct school “Open House” each fall inviting parents and community leaders to attend.
- Promote and participate in parent-teacher organizations which support the school and its activities.
- Solicit parent volunteers for various school activities.
- Promote parent reading nights of elementary stakeholders.
- Provide after-school daycare for working parents.
- Encourage parents and grandparents to visit schools and participate in certain activities with their children and grandchildren.

2. Improve parent involvement in student achievement:

Strategies:

- Expand system-wide parent conferences from six hours to twelve hours per year on non-school days.
- Offer translation services at parent meetings.
- Institute an informational program for parents as their children transition from one campus to another.
- Offer child-care services in conjunction with parent meetings.
- Provide parents/students with 4½-week student progress reports.
- Request parent signatures on 9-week progress reports.
- Stagger high school and elementary parent-teacher conferences to avoid conflicts for parents who have children attending more than one school.
- Provide after-school tutoring which promotes regular parent communication regarding student progress.
- Conduct parent/student orientation for all newly enrolled freshman students.
- Expand the student mentoring program.

3. Improve community communication and input into school system policies:

Strategies:

- Advertise all meetings in newspapers and on radio stations.
- Arrange to have school board meetings at each school site at least once each year.
- Regularly showcase positive aspects of our school system at monthly meetings.
- The school system will appoint a Family and Community Advisory Council which will review system family involvement policies annually and based on input from the local community recommend changes as needed.
- The Advisory Council will report the system’s progress toward reaching these goals to the Obion County School Board at least once each semester.

In an attempt to communicate with parents, individual schools use many of the same procedures. For example, teachers send letters home at the beginning of the school year to acquaint parents with course of study, rules, procedures, and upcoming events. Each student in the Obion County School System receives a handbook from his particular school which explains school admission requirements, policies concerning parents' visiting schools, grading system, honor roll guidelines, promotion and retention policies, code of behavior and discipline code, student attendance and tardiness procedures, Tennessee State laws pertaining to schools, library, fees, out-of-state tuition, food service, grievance procedures, communicable diseases, discrimination, permission slips. Handbooks are also posted on line at the system's website www.obioncountyschools.com. Also listed on that website are the following: District Information; School Information; Teacher Information; New Links, Reports, and Updates; Technology Information; News; and Sports. Parents are able to access teachers' e-mail addresses as well as lunch menus, TCAP information, Board Policy Manual, information about Adult Education, District Calendar, among many other topics pertaining to school. Our webmaster posts information on our website when administrators from the individual schools and supervisors from the central office staff send it to her. Likewise, teachers send home in notes to the parents their schedules, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses so that parents will know both when and how to contact them at school and at home. We publish pertinent information, such as Parent-Teacher Conferences, changes in the calendar, etc., in the local newspapers and on the local radio stations, as well as on the local television stations.

Also we provide up-to-date textbooks to all students in all classes, bought yearly as adopted on a six-year cycle. Upon request from parents, we supply textbooks on CD to students who require them. In addition to syllabi supplied by individual teachers, we provide a link on our county website www.obioncountyschools.com to the Tennessee State Board of Education where parents/community members can access state standards for all courses taught in our county schools, including student performance indicators for parents to gauge their children's success.

Our elementary schools have active Parent-Teacher Organizations which meet regularly to discuss needs of the school. All presidents of these organizations coordinate efforts with administrators at the beginning of the school year to identify needs and possible ways to meet the needs of the students with monetary donations or time donated by parents in the schools. For example, Hillcrest Elementary in Troy has a parent-involvement program initiated during the present school year. Because fingerprinting and background checks are so expensive, the Hillcrest PTO has agreed to pay the cost of these background checks so that the program can be successful. Likewise, South Fulton Elementary has a mentoring program in which parents/community leaders volunteer to mentor youngsters who have problems or who have few positive adult role models in their lives. These individuals must also submit to fingerprinting and a background check, for which the Obion County Board of Education carries the cost. In addition, Lake Road Elementary has a parent advisory council to offer suggestions for improvement at the school. High school vocational classes have in the past and continue to have active community advisory councils to support efforts of both teachers and students in the different classes.

Also our PreK program, which has classes at each elementary school, has an advisory council. The council meets regularly to discuss the program and various needs for the classrooms, as well as, parental assistance. The Obion County School System encourages parents/community to be involved in school activities by approving and supporting parent-teacher organizations and booster clubs in our schools. All elementary schools have a strong PTO; our two high schools have athletic booster clubs, band booster clubs, and alumni FFA organizations, all of which financially support students and their endeavors, both athletically and scholastically. These organizations are led by parents, independent of the school's financial obligations. Officers submit bylaws, fundraisers, and activities to encourage students to excel.

Title 1 involvement in the Parent and Community Engagement is delineated in Board Policy 4.502. This includes parent input in planning, design, and implementation of the Title 1 program and consultation of parents of participating children. The school system holds an annual meeting of parents to explain the programs, activities and curriculum available under Title 1; provides parents with reports and explanations of their children's progress; conducts conferences with the parents to discuss placement and training in methods the parents can use to complement the children's instruction; permits parents to observe Title 1 program activities; provides parents with a copy of the parental involvement policy as well as timely information about the program; develops a school-parent compact that outlines how parents, the staff, and students will share the responsibility of student achievement; and annually assesses the effectiveness of the program. This assessment is conducted with surveys and feedback from individual parents.

The leadership team for family involvement evaluated the results of the perceptual survey given to parents/stakeholders concerning their opinions of the school system. Strengths of the system included a welcoming entrance to the schools, school personnel's courteous treatment of visitors to the schools, belief that schools are safe for their children, the approachability and helpfulness of administrators, and the availability of school regulations and policies (all children receive a handbook for them and their parents to keep at home throughout the school year). Areas of need which can be addressed included the fact that parents feel they have no input in school policies before they are enacted. Also Hispanic respondents indicated that they need translation services when visiting the schools and schools need to send messages home in Spanish. Another area of need was that many indicated that they do not have telephone numbers and e-mail addresses for all teachers. Note: e-mail addresses for all teachers are listed on the system website at www.obioncountyschools.com. From these findings the team has made adjustments in our plans at the different schools, as previously noted. Both the general plan and the Title 1 plan are adjusted to reflect parental input on a yearly basis.

In an effort to keep parents informed, our teachers send home a syllabus of the class (high school) or a weekly newsletter to let the parents know what the child will be learning that week so that parents can reinforce the teachers' efforts. Attendance and discipline policies are clearly spelled out in the handbook, which each child receives at the beginning of the school year with a page in the back for parents to sign and return to the school as a check to make sure that parents actually see and have the opportunity to read policies and procedures in a number of categories. We have an attendance supervisor who monitors attendance carefully and contacts parents at the first sign of a

problem. We also have a disciplinary hearing committee to deal with serious discipline problems that unfortunately arise occasionally in our schools.

This family engagement plan is a living document, subject to review and change as needs dictate. We welcome comments/suggestions concerning this plan. Stakeholders may e-mail comments to James Faulkner at faulknerj@k12tn.net or to Nancy Hamilton at hamiltonn@k12tn.net or call 731-885-9743. Teachers and administrators strive to involve parents/community in the educational process. With that support we can ensure success for our children.