



# Creating a 'Parent Champion' Team

The role of a parent champion is primarily to:

- Help other families become familiar with S4 at events at the school (Welcome to Kindergarten, Meet the Teacher Nights, Parent Teacher Interviews, other School Celebrations, etc.)
- Organize Family Sessions with school administration for parents/caregivers
- Advocate for S4 at your child's school and share information with parents around ways families can be involved

For other ideas on how a parent champion team can be involved as part of S4 in your child's school, see the parent champion team document found on the S4 website.

In order to develop partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in S4, this process provides an outline to support a functional School-Parent S4 Champion Team.

## 1. Create an Action Team

Parents, educators, administrators, and others deemed appropriate should be represented and involved to reach a common understanding and in setting goals to which all are committed. Consider the population at your school. How do we incorporate a diverse voice within the Champion Team?

## 2. Examine Current Practice

Review the current status of parent and family involvement. Survey staff and parents to see what types of supports and resources families desire at the school. Incorporate those wants into future planning (see template survey as an example found on the S4 website Family Engagement Documents.)

## 3. Secure Support

For optimal success, keep stakeholders (those responsible for implementation, those who will be affected, and those outside the school/program who have influence over the outcome) aware of the plan and willing to lend support to its success. Determine how to involve your SEO in the events and programs you are planning with families as part of S4 at the school. Who are the other partners you'd like to include in these events (family serving agencies, community health nurse, other school communities, etc.?)

## 4. Provide Professional Development for School/Program Staff

Effective training is essential. The best models for training are those that provide Champion Team members with several opportunities to interact with the issues, work together, and monitor and evaluate progress.

Consider what kinds of training families are looking for at the school. Work with your school admin team to coordinate learning sessions for families so they can have the opportunity to join in as well!

## 5. Evaluate and Revise the Plan

Parent and family involvement is not a one-time goal. We know it is a process of continuous improvement and a commitment to long-term success. As you conduct events for families, you'll find ones with very successful components, and you'll discover other areas to adjust for next time. Create a plan to track successes and opportunities for learning to improve upon future opportunities to connect with families.



## Getting Started

### ***Template Adapted from the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2000***

Below you'll find a more detailed plan for starting and growing your Parent Champion. The more supports to aid in family engagement at the school, the better! Use this template as a guideline to get your Parent Champion Team started at your school!

### **Stage 1: Getting Started**

When beginning a new action plan for a parent group (whether it be as a part of school council, or the parent social club) it is important to make certain all the right elements are present to support a healthy collaboration.

The first stage involves learning about the processes in which you will use while beginning to organize events, getting your team organized, and building a working team. Sometimes the people on your team will be meeting for the first time. Other times, you may already be working together and want to learn the process before taking action. It's important to create an inclusive environment so all parents feel comfortable participating.

*Stage 1 steps include the following:*

- Introduce the Process
  - Develop meeting procedures that create a welcoming, productive environment that encourages active participation by team members
  - Address logistics like meeting preparation and communications to ensure that your team runs smoothly and effectively
- Gather Parent Community Information (eg. age of children, diversity within families in the school community)
  - Establish the audiences your parent group is looking to engage

### **Stage 2: Mobilizing the Team**

Your parent group must now decide how to operate—including how the team will communicate and make decisions. You must begin to think about individual people to include on the team to ensure that the team is representative and diverse.

This stage involves deciding how the team will operate.

*Stage 2 steps include the following:*

- Grow your team
  - Develop a strategy for recruiting new members in the future for support
  - Welcome new members as you grow your Champion Team and recognize those who have recruited them
- Effective Communication Plan
  - Develop ground rules for communication among team members by using consensus decision making (all participants are respected and their opinions are valued; gain widespread agreement).



- Create a comfortable environment for building team relationships and trust by agreeing on communication and behaviour ground rules
- Build Common Understanding
  - Introduce a process for structured discussion sessions that your team can use to build common understanding of engagement activities.
- Identify Shared Leadership Opportunities
  - Promote shared leadership by sharing responsibility for keeping the team organized. Ensure each member has a role to play. Create accountability of all members of the team.

### **Stage 3: Setting Direction**

Your parent group will collaborate on what types of activities/parent engagement techniques you decide upon as a group and develop your vision for how this will look. This vision will guide team members as you move into action. As your team develops a plan to engage other parents in the school community, you will develop a clearer picture of the potential results you hope to achieve.

This stage involves creating a team identity and purpose, and agreeing on goals.

*Stage 3 steps include the following:*

- Agree on a Vision
  - Decide through collective consensus what your group intends to achieve in terms of parent engagement
- Develop a Mission Statement
  - Create a statement that outlines your intention to communicate to other parents within the school community
- Identify and Prioritize Goals
  - Write specific strategies that address how your team will accomplish each goal
- Discuss Potential Challenges
  - Develop an understanding of the issues involved in achieving team strategies
  - Develop strategies to address potential challenges
- Communicate Your Message
  - Decide what information your team needs to communicate and develop a clear message to do so.
  - Create a plan for reaching your defined audience with your team's message.

### **Stage 4: Taking Action**

As your parent group implements the action plan, the team will also require monitoring and maintenance to continue to improve upon the engagement techniques used with families. Team members will find that some projects fall into place easily, while others may require more work and constant attention. The team may also find barriers that need to be addressed in order to continue to flourish. At the same time, however, team members will begin to see positive results as the team progresses and change starts to happen.

This stage involves getting more specific about how you will achieve goals, share responsibilities and monitor your progress.



*Stage 4 steps include the following:*

- Develop Strategies
  - Use shared consensus to determine what steps to take to engage parents
- Determine Necessary Tasks
  - Identify the individuals responsible for completing each task
  - Identify the resources required to implement each strategy as you list each task
  - Support shared leadership by encouraging team members to take on specific responsibilities to achieve team goals
- Establish Evaluation Methods
  - Define performance standards for strategies in your action plan; performance standards state what your team reasonably hopes to achieve and when
- Monitor Progress
  - Review your action plan and adjust tasks, responsibilities and timelines, if necessary
- Expand Network Opportunities
  - Build representative membership by recruiting new team members from your school community
  - Support shared leadership as team members draw on their individual contacts and connections to increase the team's success

### **Stage 5: Reviewing and Refining**

As the team goes through the process, members need to take time to reflect on the team's challenges and to consider what changes to make in the future. This helps the team become stronger and more effective over time. Your parent group will also have many successes to celebrate. Take the time to recognize each team member for their contributions.

This stage involves celebrating achievements, reviewing what has worked and what has not and making adjustments for the next steps.

*Stage 5 steps include the following:*

- Assess Team Effectiveness
  - Encourage shared leadership by asking team members to give feedback about team effectiveness.
  - What improvements can be made to increase family engagement?
- Celebrate Your Successes
  - Celebrate your team's achievements, in a public way that recognizes all involved, including non-members
  - Make all members feel part of the team. Sustain involvement and build momentum at the personal and team level by recognizing individual contributions
- Increase Effectiveness and Impact by Adjusting Engagement Techniques
  - Determine adjustments that you need to make to increase your team's effectiveness and impact
- Continue to Develop Additional Strategies to Engage Other Parents



The strength of the team is each individual member. The strength of each member is the team. —Phil Jackson

When you work together to create an effective plan and communication process from the beginning, your S4 Parent Champion Team will be set up for success.

## References

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (2000). Creating collaborative action teams: Working together for student success. Retrieved August 17, 2012 from <http://www.sedl.org/pubs/fam18/Guide.pdf>