



# Iowa Behavioral Alliance *Family Team*

September 2005 Conference Handout

## Working with Families . . . Ways to Get Started

*“When schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more.”* So it says in *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement* in its 2002 synthesis of 51 research studies on student outcomes. Based on these studies, we learn that specific outcomes of family-community-school work on behalf of students are:

- Higher grade point averages

and scores on standardized tests or rating scales

- Enrollment in more challenging academic programs
- More classes passed and credits earned
- Better attendance
- Improved behavior at home and school and
- Better social skills and adaptation to school.

We also learn how these partnerships are far more extensive and challenging than sponsoring car-washes at Hy-Vee! Seeing family involvement as a

collaborative effort increases the probability of successful, effective outcomes.

*Collaborative* by definition means *labor with* or *together*, and working with effort together is central to success. Friend and Cook (2003) identified the other key component—building **co-equal relationships**. Not only do schools and families *work together*, their *relationships* are those of *equals*. Although members of the school-wide PBS team have different roles, each brings a unique and necessary perspective to the table.

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*At right are members of the Central Lee Elementary School PBS Leadership Team, including the family representative, at a recent PBS training held in Ottumwa.*



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Co-equal relationships are based on trust, mutual respect, and caring.

The emphasis here is squarely on relationships. That fits, because school-wide PBS has at its root the importance of building positive relationships. An important exercise for your PBS Leadership team members may be to examine their own values about families and family involvement (See Insert for Discussion Statements).

These could also be used as the basis for each Leadership Team to develop its own set of guiding principals regarding its work with families.

While there are many challenges to involving families in School-wide PBS, the benefits far outweigh the challenges. Needs assessment and school climate surveys are integral parts of PBS and a good starting point for examining the school climate as it relates to working with families.

School-wide PBS leadership teams can serve as the vehicle for several family-centered PBS activities:

- Providing the family perspective on school policy and practice
- Assisting in assessment of school-wide climate as it relates to working with all families
- Assisting in the development and implementation of surveys to determine family understanding of and involvement in school-wide

PBS and activities to increase them accordingly

- Participating in the students' behavior training sessions to demonstrate that the school's behavior goals are shared at home.
- Providing a link between the Leadership Team and families different from the school's majority in racial, ethnic, religious, or socioeconomic features as well as those whose lives are circumscribed by their own or their children's disabilities.

But the crucial work of the parent- and school-members of the PBS Leadership teams is the work of building and maintaining relationships. Margaret Wheatley (2002) in her book *Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future*, sets out the following principles that can help us in that important relationship work:

- Acknowledge one another as equals.

The following are items adapted from a family engagement survey developed by Anne Henderson and Karen Mapp (2002). Your School-wide Leadership Team may want to discuss and modify them to use as guiding principles for family involvement in your school.

- We recognize that all parents regardless of income, educational level or cultural background want their children to do well in school.
- We create situations and environments that support families to guide their children's learning at home.
- We develop the skills and capacity of school staff to work with families.
- We place a high value on efforts to engage families in developing trusting, respectful relationships.
- We share power with families.

- Try to stay curious about each other.
- Recognize that we need each other's help to become better listeners.
- Slow down so we have time to think and reflect.

The message is clear and simple: *Students benefit when families and educators can work collaboratively on their behalf.*

School-wide PBS provides the structure and system that can ensure successful family involvement in schools.