Questions to Consider for Small Parent Groups/Parent Cafés

A Tool for Gathering Meaningful Parent Input into Title I Parental Involvement Plans and Documents

What is the ultimate goal for seeking parent input in Title I parental involvement? To continuously seek ways in which to improve our schools and school systems by gathering meaningful feedback from our stakeholders. Feedback is another form of job or performance evaluation. Our schools will only continue to improve if they know how they are doing and parents should be given the opportunity to keep them informed.

Parents are not likely to provide input if they know the only reason that schools are asking for their opinions is because they are required to do so by law. The input process should begin by developing a relationship and building trust so that parents know that the school actually values their opinions, will open its ears to their suggestions and will incorporate their ideas into the school's plans. One way to do this is by creating small parent groups or developing a parent café.

If the purpose of the event is to gather feedback and ideas, then why should schools spend most of the time talking and giving a presentation rather than listening and asking questions? Using techniques developed by the World Café model, schools and districts can create a structured event that will encourage people to use their personal knowledge to discover solutions for shared problems.

Below you will find a series of reaction and application questions that may be used to establish the dialogue process and begin the collaborative journey to revising Title I Parental Involvement plans, policies, compacts and budgets. Not all questions will be relevant to your agenda so feel free to use only the questions that meet your time constraints and meeting objective. In designing these questions, the goal was to keep the scope broad enough to illicit thoughtful responses and deeper thinking than one word answers. So, as you will see, many are not necessarily focused on specific questions about individual topics. These questions would probably be best suited to gather big picture ideas that can later be used to address specific areas. Additionally, the questions can be adapted to include a specific focus area depending on the purpose of the meeting for each school or district.

The table facilitator leads the dialogue process by asking the questions. Facilitators may change the order of the questions and may direct the questions to the team members in any order. Dialogues do not permit cross talk between team members; however, the facilitator may expand or go deeper on a question by asking follow-up questions. Please refer to The World Café: Café to Go! (www.theworldcafe.com) quick reference guide for more information about conducting a parent café.

Parent Café Reaction Questions*
1. Why is family engagement in schools and community important?
2. What does family engagement mean to you? • From the family perspective, what are some of the common views of engagement? • From the school perspective, what are some of the common views of engagement? • From the student/youth perspective, what are some of the common views of engagement?
3. What does a school with high parental involvement look like to you?
4. Researchers have shown that all parents can have an influence on their child(ren)'s academic success regardless of socioeconomic, racial/ethnic, and educational background for students of all ages. • Can you share your experience related to family engagement in reaction to the statement above?
5. In your experience, are there stakeholders who may not want to engage with schools? • Please describe an example that illustrates this point.
6. In your experience, are there any stakeholders who may not need to be engaged with schools? • Please describe an example that speaks to this point.
7. In your view, who is responsible for promoting engagement? • Who might agree/disagree with this view?
8. In your experience, what groups report being successfully engaged in family-school collaboration? • What can we learn from this?
9. What does it mean to communicate high expectations?
10. What is important to you for your child's education?
11. What conditions lead to engaged families?
12. What is it that families can provide that schools cannot as it relates to student achievement?
13. What needs do families have that, if fulfilled, would help them work with their children to improve their children's academic achievement?
14. Consider the following excerpt from our source document. "While some parents are informed about some things some of the time by some teachers in some schools, some families still feel 'lucky' to be informed about or asked to participated in activities with their children." • What is your reaction to this statement?

15. What questions are we not asking about family engagement?
16. What had real meaning for you from what you've heard?

Parent Café Application Questions*
1. What are some of the most successful strategies for engaging families in support of their child(ren)'s academic success? • What might this look like for older students?
2. What does a comprehensive approach to family engagement look like across grade spans? • What does family engagement look like in high school? • What does family engagement look like in middle school? • What does family engagement look like in elementary school? • What does family engagement look like in preschool? • Do you have other thoughts on this?
3. How can we engage parents and the community so they see themselves as essential to student academic success?
4. What role do you see yourself serving in the school community?
5. The research says that all parents, regardless of income, education level, race/ethnicity, or cultural background, can have a positive impact on student achievement by engaging with their child(ren)'s school. What types of activities might build the capacity for staff to work with all families? • What types of activities might create a school culture that considers the needs and assets of all families? • What types of activities would build the family capacity to work with educators? • If these activities do not exist, who should develop them?
6. What are the steps that we can take to improve communication between school and home?
7. What are the smallest actions we could take that would make the biggest difference for parental involvement in your child's classroom/school/district?
8. What are some observable behaviors in schools that make families more/less invited?
9. What is the role of the community in promoting deeper family engagement in ensuring student academic success?
10. Several stakeholders have reported a "no news is good news" approach to engagement between families and schools. Some feel this comes about because schools/families have taken/assumed separate roles. Others feel that families retreat because they're uncomfortable or don't feel competent in educational aspects of their children's lives. Are

there other explanations? • What are some ways to address these behaviors observed in family-school interactions?
11. What are some specific examples of how families, themselves, build parent leadership skills?
12. What are specific examples of how the school could share information with families about the curriculum, testing, and grade-level standards?
13. Several stakeholders stated the need to promote more understanding and interaction between families and staff members that move beyond the typical kinds of engagement. • What are some ways to support families as they try out new behaviors? • What are some ways to support or coach staff through these changes?
14. What are some specific examples of how families can support learning at home?
15. How can we combine/use our resources to meet the educational needs of our families?
16. What could be done that would enable you to feel fully engaged and energized about family engagement at your child's school?

*Many reaction and application questions were taken from ***The Georgia Department of Education Circles of Adults Focusing on Education (C.A.F.E.) Dialogue Implementation Guide: Tools and Strategies for School Stakeholder Teams to Impact Graduation and Career Readiness Efforts for Students With and Without Disabilities*** (June 2013). Retrieved at http://www.gaspdg.org/sites/www.gaspdg.org/files/resources/documents/cafe_manual_cds_8-22-13_final_2.pdf

Groups may also wish to use quotes to inspire ideas and frame conversations among parents. Here are a few to consider:

Parent Café Quotes
"If not larger dreams for organizations, what? If not you, who? If not now, when?" - Dee Hock
"Team members create new points of view through dialogue and discussion. They pool their information and examine it from various angles. Eventually, they integrate their diverse individual perspectives into a new collective perspective." - Nanonka, the Knowledge Creating Company
"Stakeholders in any system have within them the wisdom and creativity to confront even the most difficult challenges." - Unknown

“Instead of pouring knowledge into people's heads, we need to help them grind a new set of glasses, so they can see the world in a new way. That involves challenging the implicit assumptions that have shaped the way people have historically looked at things.” - John Seeley Brown
“If I had an hour to solve a problem and my life depended on the solution, I would spend the first 55 minutes determining the proper question to ask, for once I know the proper question, I could solve the problem in less than five minutes” - Albert Einstein
“A question not asked is a door not opened.” - Marilee Goldberg