



***Discovery* Parent Engagement Datakit:
A Tool for Community Collaboratives**

Based on Discovery Communities' Experience
Data provided by the Center for Assessment and Policy Development (CAPD)
as part of its evaluation of the
William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund's
Discovery Initiative

Introduction

A core value of the *Discovery* initiative is parent engagement. The Memorial Fund believes that sustained change will happen with the active engagement of all parents and in particular those whose children need more help to achieve school success. Parent engagement in collaboration with others at the community and state levels will build collective voice and ensure that plans and policies reflect diverse interests and experiences, bring a wide range of knowledge and skills to the table, and create the foundation for sustained work.

The term parent, as used here, refers to children's most immediate caretakers – mothers, fathers and, often, grandparents and other relatives or adults who accept responsibility for their nurturance, safety and well-being. The guide focuses mainly on people who are operating primarily from their parenting role. That is, while many of the people who work on behalf of children (child care providers, health care providers, etc.) are parents, this guide is focused on parents who are not also in these kinds of professional positions.

The Memorial Fund views parent participation as an ongoing process in which parents, at varying times, may take multiple roles that include:

Information: Parents access information on services and supports

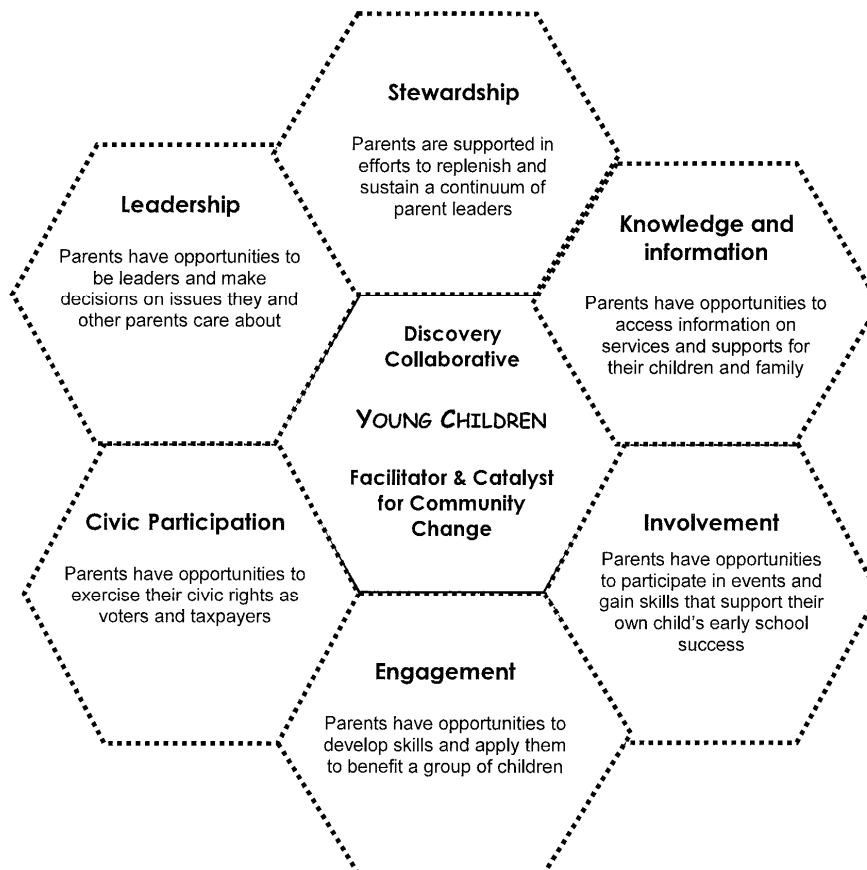
Involvement: Parents gain skills to support their own child's early school success

Engagement: Parents develop skills and apply them to benefit a group of children

Civic Participation: Parents exercise their civic rights as voters and taxpayers

Leadership: Parents are leaders on issues they and other parents care about

Stewardship: Communities sustain a continuum of parent opportunities



How to use this guide

Although parent participation is important across the entire community, this specific guide is focused on parental *engagement* at the *Discovery* collaborative table. The collaborative table is a group of interested stakeholders who come together to work for young children. The *Discovery* collaborative groups are expected to create an environment where there are opportunities for parents to participate in crafting community strategies to benefit all children.

The Parent Engagement Datakit provides information as collected through the *Discovery* evaluation process in mid-2006, conducted by the Center for Assessment and Policy Development. It provides some initial data on key dimensions of parent engagement in *Discovery* collaborative groups. The guide also provides questions that communities can ask themselves to continue to build parent participation at the collaborative table.

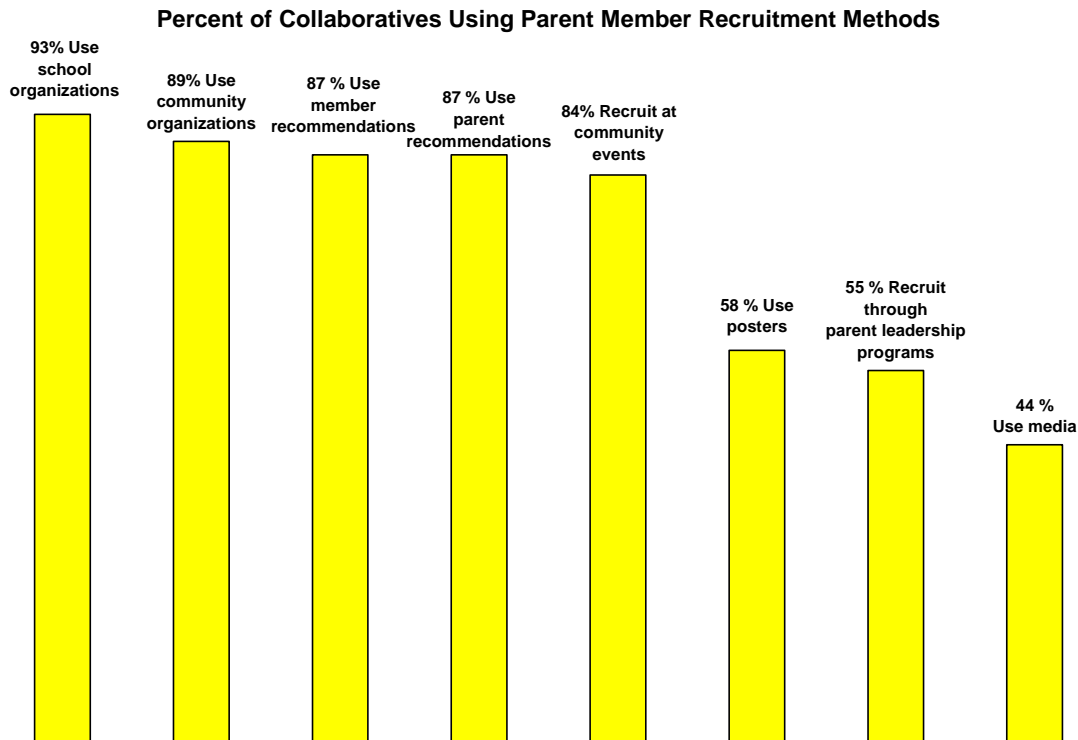
The Datakit includes data and questions on the following issues:

- Parent recruitment
- Parent supports
- Parent membership in Discovery collaboratives
- Parent input from non-members
- Parent leadership in Discovery collaboratives
- Parent participation opportunities

Parent recruitment

What does parent recruitment mean to *Discovery*: Parents are key to any effort to improve the lives of children and influence early care and education policy and budget matters. Recruitment of parents to become involved in advocating for young children can be difficult, but it is necessary to ensure a diversity of ideas and ownership over strategies to support children.

Data



Center for Assessment and Policy Development, 2006

Findings based on data

Most collaboratives relied on recruiting through other organizations, recommendations of parent and other current members, and community events. As with other parent engagement efforts, building on current relationships and word-of-mouth were extensively used.

Some of the various ways to recruit parents are:

- Invite parents involved in preschool or school parent organizations
- Invite parents active in other community organizations or groups
- Invite parents who were recommended by other collaborative members
- Ask parents currently active in the *Discovery* work to recommend other parents
- Hold events or attend community activities and invite parents to participate
- Put up posters or distribute flyers inviting parents to participate
- Invite parents from parent leadership training programs
- Invite parents – via newspaper, radio or TV announcements or news reports – to participate.

Questions for communities to ask themselves:

How have parents been recruited to participate in your community's collaborative body or in its activities?

How have you shown parents that they are truly valued and respected?

What methods have worked best for your collaborative in bringing in parents and keeping them active and involved?

What new methods might you try?

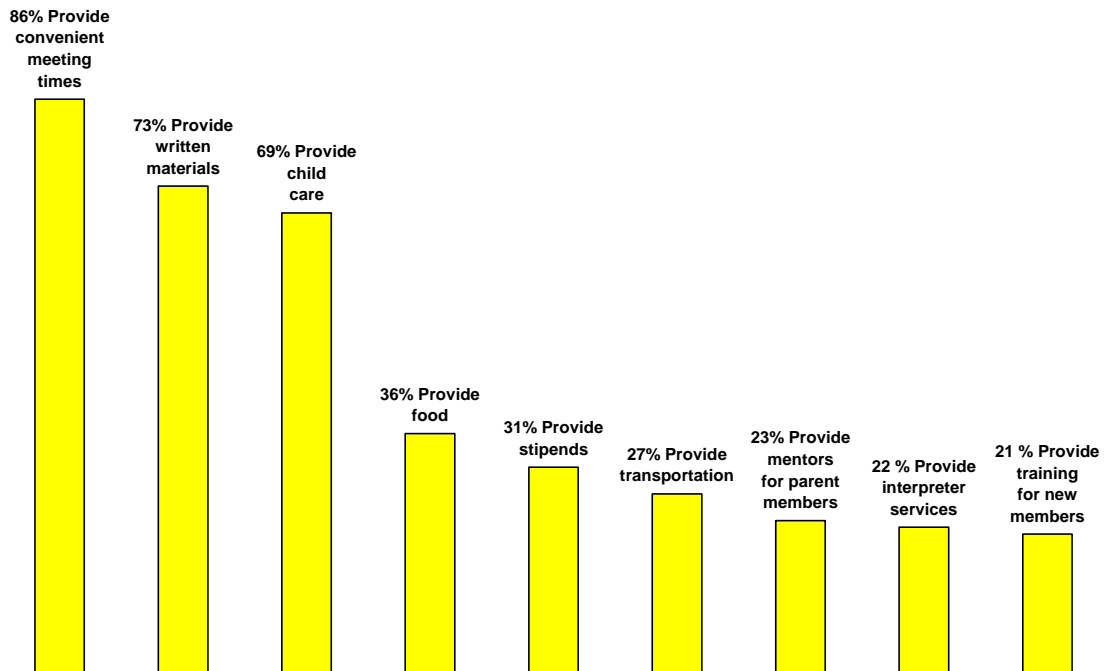
Parent supports

What does parent support mean to *Discovery*:

In *Discovery*, collaborative groups provide parents with supports to make it easier for parents to engage with the work. With proper supports, parents have greater opportunity to participate, and more diverse voices are brought to the collaborative work for improving early care and education.

Data

Percent of Collaboratives Providing Supports for Parent Members



Center for Assessment and Policy Development, 2006

Findings from data

Most collaboratives tried to have meeting times and places that were convenient for parents, and many provided written materials for members. Child care was provided by many collaboratives as well.

About one-third of collaboratives provided food and/or a stipend to support parent members. About one-quarter provided transportation, interpreter assistance, and/or a mentor for parent members. About one-fifth had new member training for all members, including parents.

Questions for communities to ask themselves:

Does your community's *Discovery* collaborative group do any of the following to help make it easier for parents to participate on your collaborative or committees? (Check all that apply.)

- Hold a training specifically for new members (not necessarily for parents only) in *Discovery*
- Provide translation and interpreter services
- Pair a parent new to *Discovery* with a more experienced person as a “mentor”
- Provide transportation assistance
- Provide a stipend or honorarium (either monetary or otherwise)
- Provide food
- Provide child care
- Provide written materials describing the *Discovery* group and its work
- Schedule meetings at times and places that are convenient for the parent members

What other opportunities could your collaborative create to support parental engagement?

What seems to work best for your collaborative in supporting parent engagement?

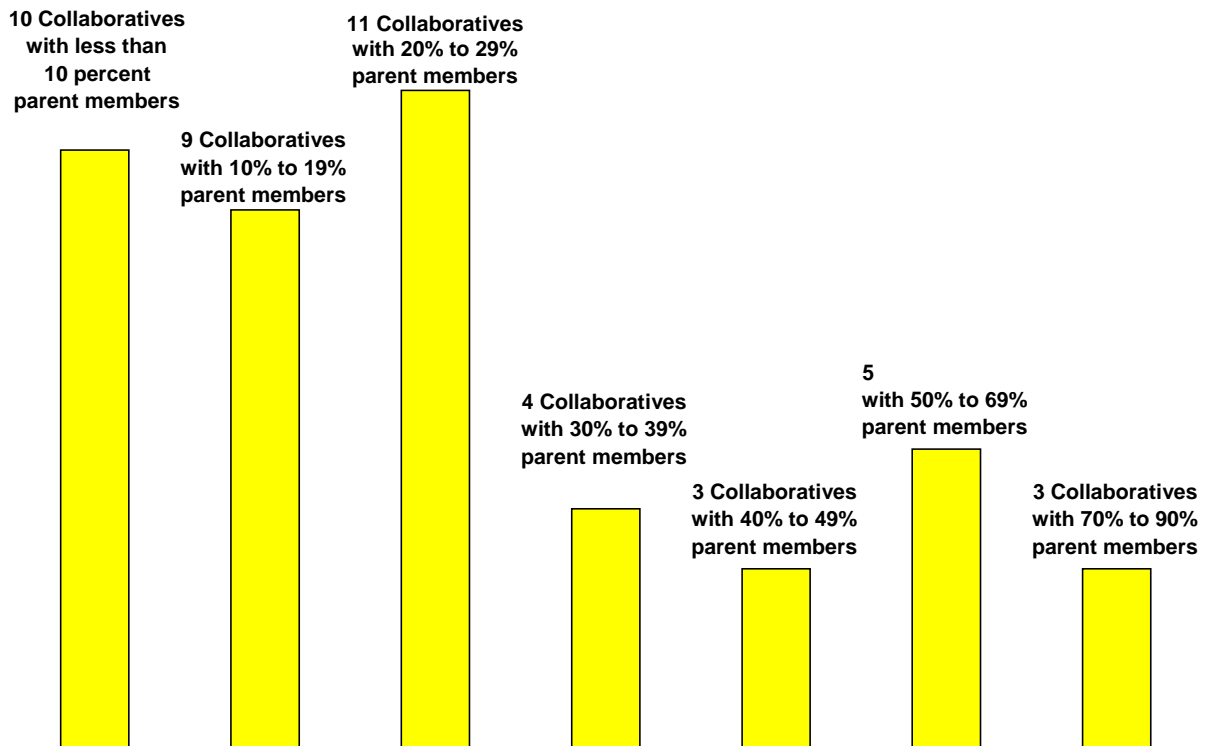
Parent membership in *Discovery* collaboratives

What does parent membership mean to *Discovery*:

Sustaining diverse parent membership on the collaborative is important to ensure that multiple viewpoints and ideas are represented in conversations and decisions. It is also important for connecting with parents and parent groups outside the collaborative. Parent membership is thought to increase parent and community ownership over the strategies created to support children.

Data

Of 45 Collaboratives, Number with Parents as Percent of



Center for Assessment and Policy Development, 2006

Findings from data

Two-thirds of *Discovery* collaborative groups had less than 30 percent parent members. Only 8 collaboratives had a majority (more than 50 percent) of parent members.

Questions for communities to ask themselves:

How many people currently are involved in the *Discovery* collaborative group? How many of these are parents?

Do parents on your collaborative represent the diversity of parents within the community?

How can you increase parent membership on your collaborative?

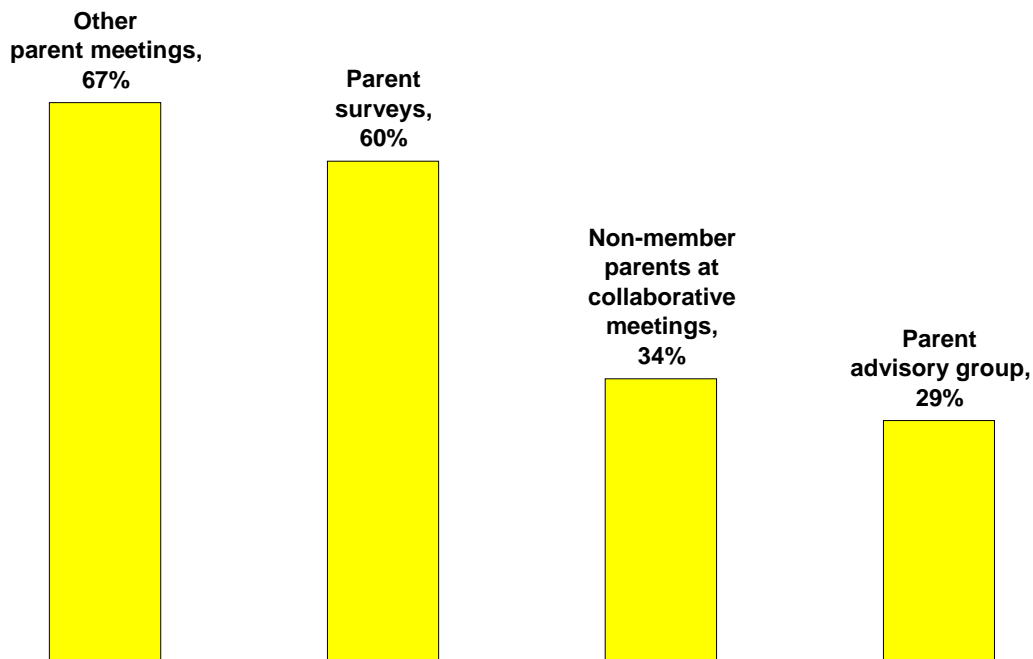
Parent input from non-members

What does non-member input mean to *Discovery*:

Parental engagement does not involve just parents who are members on a collaborative but rather involves many parents from across the community. There are various ways to encourage non-member parent input.

Data

Percent of Collaboratives Getting Non-Member Parent Input through...



Center for Assessment and Policy Development, 2006

Findings from data

Many – between 60 and 70 percent – collaboratives get input from non-member parents at meetings of other parent groups or through surveys they conduct. About 3 in 10 collaboratives have a formal parent advisory group.

Questions for communities to ask themselves:

Other than having parents serve on your community's *Discovery* collaborative, over the past 12 months how else has the collaborative gotten information, ideas and feedback from parents? (Check all that apply).

- Through parent or community meetings
- Through a parent or community survey or questionnaire
- Through parents who are not members attending collaborative meetings
- Through a parent or community advisory group
- Through focus groups
- Through one-on-one interviews
- In some other ways

What other methods could your collaborative use to get input from non-member parents?

How can your collaborative ensure input from a diverse range of parents in the community?

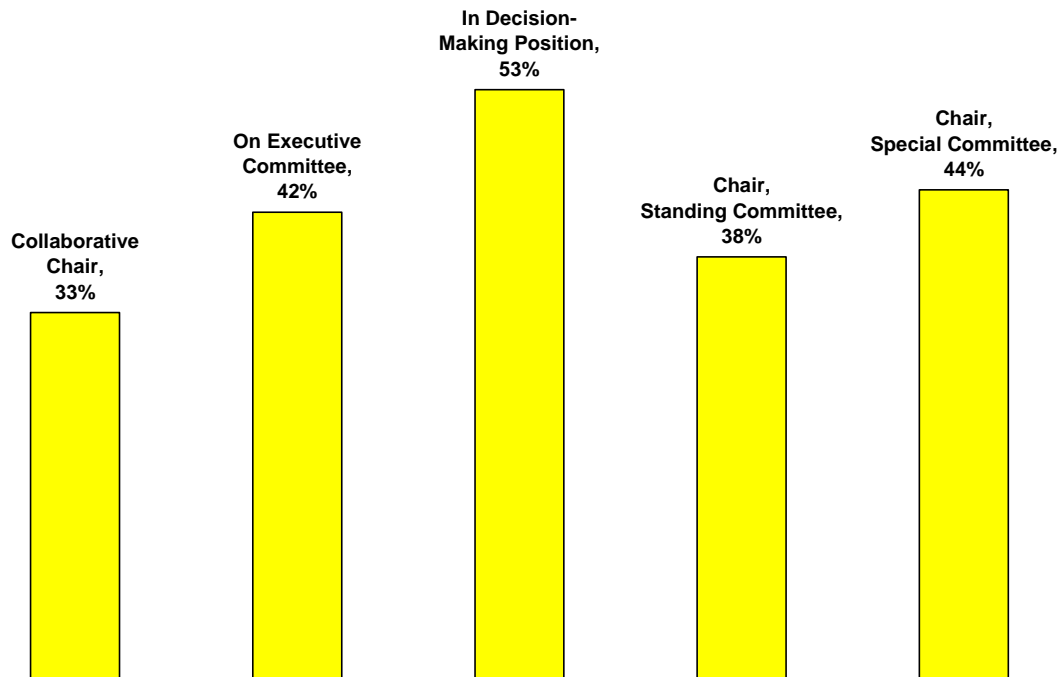
Parent leadership in *Discovery* collaboratives

What does parent leadership mean to *Discovery*:

Parents can take on various leadership roles in the overall collaborative as well as on various committees and projects. Parent leadership supports the collaborative and also serves to prepare members to take on other leadership positions in the community.

Data

Of 45 Collaboratives, Percent with Parents in Leadership



Center for Assessment and Policy Development, 2006

Findings from data

About one-third of the *Discovery* collaboratives have a chair or co-chair and about half have parents on an executive committee. In addition, around 40 percent of *Discovery* collaboratives have parent chairs of standing and/or special committees.

Questions for communities to ask themselves:

Does your group have a chair or co-chairs? Does a parent serve in a chair role?

Is there a group within your *Discovery* collaborative group that is responsible for making decisions (like a steering committee or executive committee)? How many in that group are parents?

How might you increase parent leadership on your collaborative?

Does our collaborative have the ability and willingness to orient and support new leadership?

What are the challenges to engaging more parents in leadership roles? How could you address these challenges?

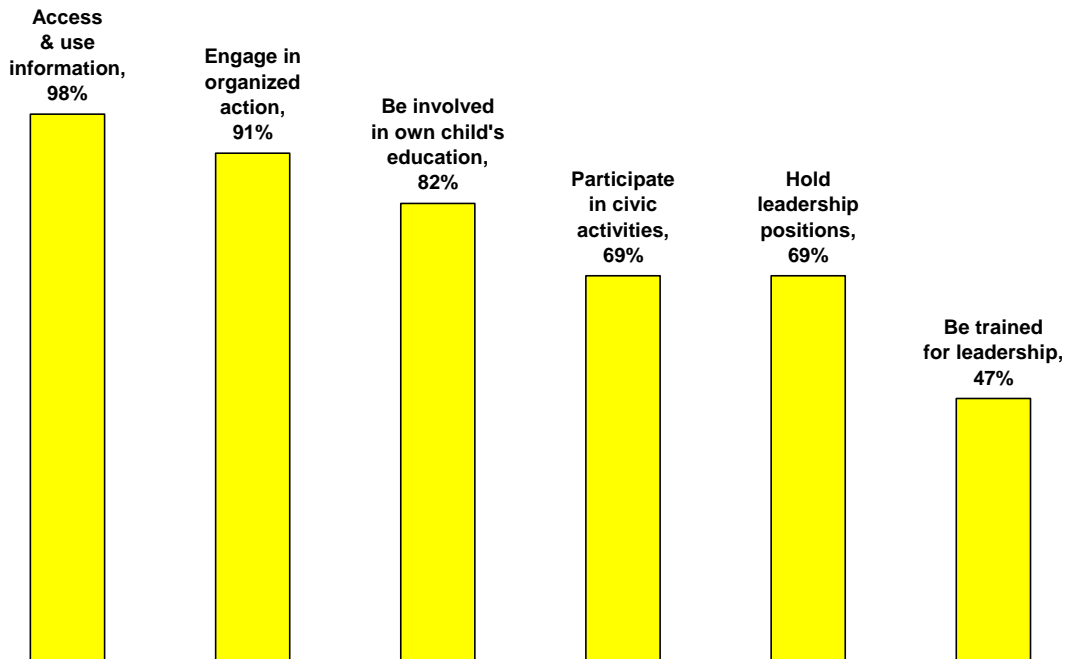
Parent participation opportunities

What does parent participation opportunity mean to *Discovery*:

There are many ways that parents can participate in educational change. These range from involvement with their own children's learning opportunities to holding community leadership positions. It is critical for collaboratives to provide opportunities for parents to become engaged.

Data

Percent of Collaboratives Providing Opportunities for Parents to...



Center for Assessment and Policy Development, 2006

Findings from data

Almost all collaboratives were working to provide parents with information through resource guides, inserts in local newspapers, web sites, etc.

Most (between 80 and 90 percent) were encouraging parents to participate in groups working on behalf of the community's children (such as *Discovery*) and to become involved with their child's school.

About 70 percent were providing opportunities to educate parents as voters, to register them, and to encourage them to vote. An equal number of collaboratives were encouraging parents to take on leadership positions in other organizations in the community.

Just under half of the collaboratives supported parent leadership programs such as Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI), People Empowering People (PEP) and Parents Supporting Excellence in Education (ParentSEE).

Questions for communities to ask themselves:

Which areas are currently reflected in your community's *Discovery* work plan? (Check all that apply).

- **Information:** Parents have opportunities to access information on services and supports for their children and family – such as attending a workshop on child development, using a community service directory, finding information at the town library.
- **Involvement:** Parents have opportunities to participate in events and gain skills that support their own child's early school success – such as attending school performances, reading to own child, volunteering in the classroom.
- **Engagement:** Parents have opportunities to develop skills and apply them to benefit a group of children – such as joining the Parent-Teacher Association, joining the *Discovery* collaborative, attending a Community Conversation.
- **Civic Participation:** Parents have opportunities to exercise their civic rights as voters and taxpayers – such as voting, attending town meetings, volunteering on a civic project like a park cleanup.
- **Leadership:** Parents have opportunities to be leaders and make decisions on issues they and other parents care about – such as running parent-led projects, serving on a community board, being chair of the School Readiness Council.
- **Stewardship:** Parents are supported in efforts to replenish and sustain a continuum of parent leaders – creating a parent training fund, ensuring access to parent leadership training and development opportunities, ensuring parent participation in selecting leaders of community organizations, supporting parent-led advocacy groups.

How can your collaborative continue to support parental participation?

How can you ask parents what supports they need in order to participate?