



*Sample Grant Proposal for Schools Seeking Funds to Support ParentNet
(You may copy any or all of this material)*

Summary

ParentNet is a volunteer, parent-directed program within a school community that helps parents understand how they can positively impact their child's growth and development. The program uses a blend of business and educational strategies combined with sound research on child and adolescent development, risk prevention and resiliency, and educational achievement. Through structured peer-support meetings and effective parent-school communication, ParentNet seeks to enhance children's developmental assets and promote academic and social success.

National ParentNet Association

Statement of Purpose

The National ParentNet Association (NPNA) advocates the development of collaborative parent-school communities by providing leadership, training materials and guidance to schools participating in ParentNet® -- a program that facilitates discussion of everyday parenting topics, encourages parent networking and mutual support, and enhances communication between parents, students and schools.

Vision

To create a paradigm shift in American schools that expands the role of parents from "traditional parent volunteers" to a new category of fully engaged parents who influence both student success and the effectiveness of their school community.

Brief History

ParentNet began on a grassroots level in 1996 at The Overlake School, a private, independent school in Redmond, Washington. Two eighth-grade parents, Sue Grijalva and Marilyn Price-Mitchell, worked with other parents and school administrators to create a forum where parents could discuss their experiences, childrearing strategies, personal fears, and solutions.

"In our world today, where families live apart from one another and parenting is more complicated than ever, a parenting support network is both desired and needed. Through ParentNet, parents meet others and discuss topics that are important and meaningful to them. ParentNet's basic tenets of confidentiality and non-judgment allow for safe and honest interactions. At our diverse school, we have worked with our non-English speaking parents to include them in our gatherings and provide them much needed resources."

Joyce Teshima, Principal
Rose Hill Elementary School,
Kirkland, WA

Word spread to other schools, who wanted to start the program. Grijalva and Price-Mitchell developed support materials and a training program to prepare volunteer parent facilitators. During its "pilot" phase from 1997 to 2006, ParentNet greatly involved its member schools, both private and public, in developing and refining the program, to better meet the needs of parents and schools. A project in low-income public schools, sponsored by the Discuren Foundation of Seattle, led to additional ways of involving public schools who struggle with low parent involvement and lack of parent leadership.

"Parents working together can multiply significantly the benefits to their children and their schools. Educator Patrick Bassett cites partnerships with parents as one of the most important indicators of school quality. Founded by parents, ParentNet provides parents with the opportunity to learn from each other and work together to build mutually supportive relationships in their own school communities."

Len Goodstein, Former CEO
American Psychological Association
Washington D.C.

In 2000, a financial gift from a participating ParentNet family in Tampa, Florida, allowed for the creation of the non-profit National ParentNet Association. By 2006, more than 10,000 families had been served by ParentNet and its 1500 trained parent volunteers in more than 30 private and public schools. In 2007, the NPNA board of directors adopted a plan that would facilitate the low-cost implementation of ParentNet in any interested school. Today, ParentNet materials are distributed via the ParentNet website at www.parentinvolvementmatters.org.

Record of Accomplishments

Participating schools report great success with the ParentNet model and the average parent participation is 30%, very high for a parent involvement program. Nationally recognized education experts are taking note. Renowned psychologists and authors Mary Pipher, Ph.D. and Jane Nelsen, Ph.D. have joined the Board of Advisors of NPNA as well as Len Goodstein, Ph.D. former President of the American Psychological Association and Ann T. Henderson, a leading expert on parent involvement in education.

Statement of Need

Why ParentNet?

When the parents of today were children, their parents were likely to be associated with other parents. Families lived in the same neighborhoods, attended similar social functions and knew their children's friends. Parents shared support and ideas about child rearing and many adults were actively involved in helping children grow up. That sense of community and consistent interaction was beneficial to parents, to schools, and most of all to children.

The world today is quite different. Parents may commute long distances to work, often relocate to different neighborhoods and are likely to socialize within a wide geographic area. Neighborhood attachments are less common, social stressors on parents and children alike are much greater, and the rapid growth of technology in the home has increased both an intimate connection to the world and isolation from one another.

"My parents are from a different culture – they are from India. They don't know that much about American life, and American teenagers' lives. So they come to ParentNet meetings and ask questions about life in America, and learn how to deal with issues they've never dealt with before."

Akshay Krishnamurty, Student
Overlake School, Redmond,
WA

This fast-paced culture has also placed substantial strain on today's schools. As teachers, counselors and administrators strive to develop the higher academic standards demanded by a more socially and economically complex world, they must also cope with limited resources, and with increased school violence involving children who are socially and emotionally unattached.

Parents must play a major role in their child’s academic, social and emotional development, but they cannot do so in isolation from one another and from other adults with whom their children interact. Dr. Ronald Taffel, a psychologist and expert on parenting, says “Self-sufficient parenting is not only a myth, it is a debilitating and destructive expectation...Parents need to develop more of the reliable, taken-for-granted networks of previous generations – to help deal with the everyday humdrum issues of child rearing. When groups of parents bond together in response to the myriad of everyday problems, the communities they form are a small step toward re-creating the dependable neighborhood networks of days gone by.”¹

ParentNet was designed, not to duplicate the communities of years past, but to cultivate communities that work today, that address the expectations, concerns and triumphs of parents in a fast-paced, chaotic world. ParentNet meetings provide an opportunity to discuss topics, both “humdrum” and profound, about raising healthy, successful children. It is vital that parents and schools work together to increase their confidence about managing the early, middle and adolescent years, and it is this that will help parents help children become better students and citizens.

Developmental Framework

ParentNet uses a behavior-based model to bring about positive change in a school community. Utilizing proven methods from the fields of Organization Development and Management Training, ParentNet was carefully crafted to encourage the use of behaviors that help parents become engaged in the education of their children. We know from many years of organizational research that certain behaviors are very helpful in building communities that nurture collaboration. These helpful skills are taught to parent facilitators and modeled in ParentNet meetings.

“The Parent Contract is incredibly important, because it sets some structure and boundaries around a meeting. It could be very intimidating to walk into a meeting and not know what it’s about and what it’s not about. It lets people stay within their comfort zone, it keeps people on track, and it provides a level of structure that people feel much more comfortable with.”

Kim Axelrod, ParentNet Volunteer
Emily Dickenson Elementary
Redmond, WA

Exhaustive studies have shown that when schools work collaboratively with families, students tend to succeed not just in school but also throughout life. When parents are involved, students achieve more, regardless of socioeconomic status or ethnic/racial background. The most accurate predictor of a student’s achievement in school is not income or social status, but the extent to which the student’s family is able to (1) create a home environment that encourages learning; (2) communicate high, yet reasonable expectations for their children’s achievements and future careers; and (3) become involved in their children’s education at school and in the community.² Greater parent involvement produces higher student achievement, better attendance, higher graduation rates, and more positive student attitudes and behavior. It also raises teacher morale, enhances the problem-solving abilities of school communities and creates a more supportive environment for learning.³

The National Parent Teacher Association has supported the need for parent/family involvement programs in public schools for many years. One of four current legislative directives of the NPTA is to assist parents in developing the skills they need to raise and protect their children. ParentNet meets all six of the PTA National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs, and has been developed to build supportive parent-school partnerships in all schools, both private and public.

¹ Taffel, R. *Parenting by Heart*. Perseus Books, March 1993.

² Henderson and Berla, *A New Generation of Evidence: The Family is Critical to Student Achievement*, Center for Law and Education, Washington D.C. 1997.

³ Ubid.U

Similar Existing Projects

ParentNet is different from the informal social events often held by schools to encourage parent contact, as well as from the PTA where parents typically perform services for the school. NPNA has found no other programs providing the detailed structure, intensive parent-volunteer training, and grade-by-grade parent support components of ParentNet.

Proposal

Description of ParentNet Model

ParentNet is a parent-directed program within a school community that helps parents understand how they can positively impact their child’s growth and development. The unique characteristics of the ParentNet program include:

- A structured model for parent meetings at each grade level.
- A “Parent Contract” that guides discussion and simultaneously models helpful communication skills.
- Opportunities for small group discussion on topics chosen by parents.
- A feedback loop that provides discussion summaries to parents and appropriate teachers and school administrators.
- A faculty liaison who encourages partnership between parents and school by guiding parents towards finding solutions to shared parent/school issues.
- Experiential training for all parent facilitators and faculty liaisons, including a comprehensive handbook for ongoing reference.
- An archive of discussion summaries that provide valuable information to help plan parent education seminars and specialized programs for students.

ParentNet meetings are structured to promote openness and trust among parents, to discuss current and relevant parenting topics, issues and concerns, and to provide immediate mechanisms for feedback, action planning, and follow-up. Trained parent facilitators lead the two-hour meetings, usually two to three times during the school year at each grade level. A designated faculty advisor, often a school counselor, attends ParentNet meetings to provide a liaison between parents and the school, answer school-related questions and assist facilitators as needed.

Launching and maintaining ParentNet shows a great deal of commitment to the importance of parent involvement on the part of the parents, staff, and faculty. Although there are no national fees for being a part of ParentNet, other factors such as stipends for faculty liaisons, childcare, training, and promotional materials require some expenditure of funds.

“Not only has ParentNet provided a safe place for parents to discuss parenting for the past five years, but it has also succeeded in building greater communication and problem-solving capability between our parents and school.”

Joseph Merluzzi
Head of School
Berkeley Preparatory
School, Tampa, FL

The following is our projected budget for the _____ calendar year. We are applying for a grant in the amount of _____ to cover our first-year costs.

[Include an itemized budget and any particular details about your program that your funder should be aware of.]