

PARENTNET®



AT YOUR SCHOOL

Children Have the **POTENTIAL**
to Achieve their Dreams.

An Introductory Guide for Parent Leaders, Educators and Trainers

Marilyn Price-Mitchell and Susan Grijalva

We Have the **POWER** to
Help Them Succeed.



This is a 15-page preview of a 31-page booklet. To get the entire booklet, please purchase the ParentNet Starter Kit.

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ParentNet At Your School
A Guide for Parent Leaders, Educators and Trainers
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Imagine...

An occasion to discuss parenting —
one of the most important jobs we possess in a lifetime.
A time to share experiences, ideas, and knowledge, both everyday and
profound, about raising healthy children.
A chance to listen to the views of other parents,
realizing there is more than one way to see everything.
A moment to consider the collective group wisdom, to reflect,
“How can I be a better parent?”
An opportunity to foster a strong parent-school community,
shaping the environment that nourishes our children.

Welcome to

PARENTNET®

Introduction to ParentNet®

This introductory guide is designed to help you understand the underlying theory, methodology and organizational management of ParentNet, a parent-directed program that helps parents understand how they can positively impact their child's growth and development. Created specifically for use in schools, it is a way for parents to build a sense of community, learn from one another, and make a positive difference in the lives of their children. The material contained in this guide provides parent leaders, educators and trainers information to:

- ◆ ***Understand the type of parent involvement that ParentNet promotes***
- ◆ ***Assess your school's readiness for ParentNet***
- ◆ ***Learn what is involved in leading and managing ParentNet***
- ◆ ***Decide how to choose a ParentNet Trainer***

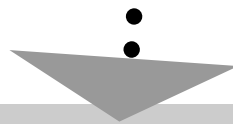
ParentNet was developed in 1996 at The Overlake School, a private, independent school, in Redmond, Washington. The program grew to other schools through the grassroots efforts of hundreds of parents, school administrators, and counselors over a period of eleven years. Funded by the Johnson Family Foundation of Tampa, Florida; the Discuren Foundation of Seattle, Washington; and ParentNet's founding schools, more than thirty schools in five states successfully implemented and refined ParentNet during this time. These included both public and private schools from Pre-Kindergarten through High School. As a result of these efforts, the non-profit National ParentNet Association now makes ParentNet available free to any school wanting to launch the program.

"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, Ph.D.

*Former CEO
American Psychological Association*

The following proven "Factors for Success" are the foundation of ParentNet. Please visit our website for additional resources and answers to frequently-asked questions not contained in this Guide.



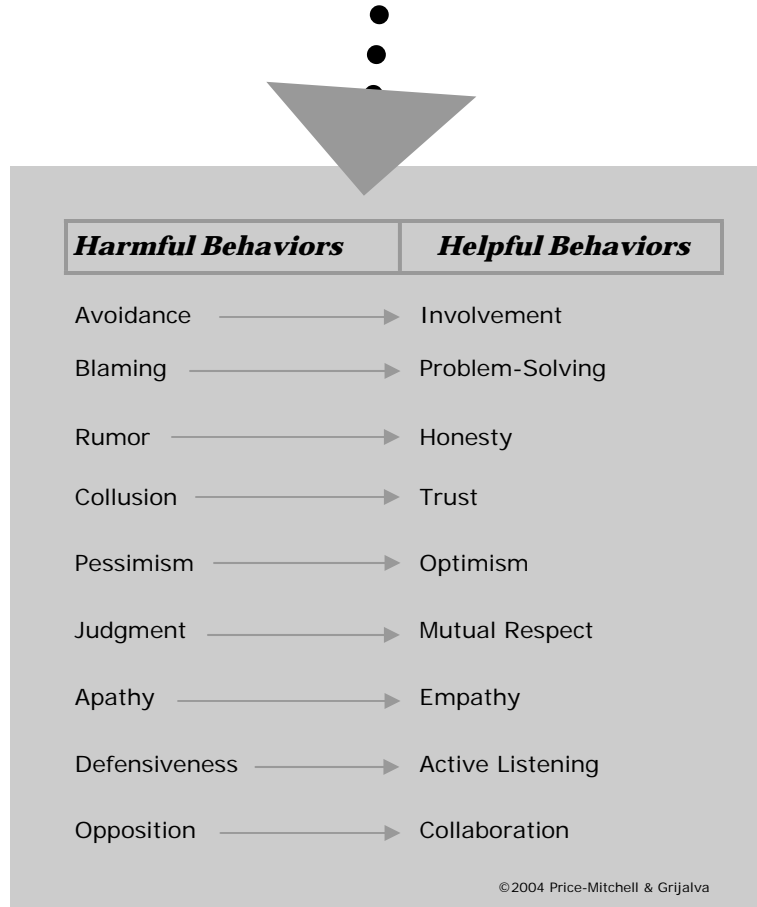
Factors for Success

- ◆ A "Parent Contract" that guides discussion.
- ◆ Meetings facilitated by trained volunteers.
- ◆ Discussion topics chosen by parents in attendance.
- ◆ A Faculty Liaison present at meetings.

www.ParentInvolvementMatters.Org

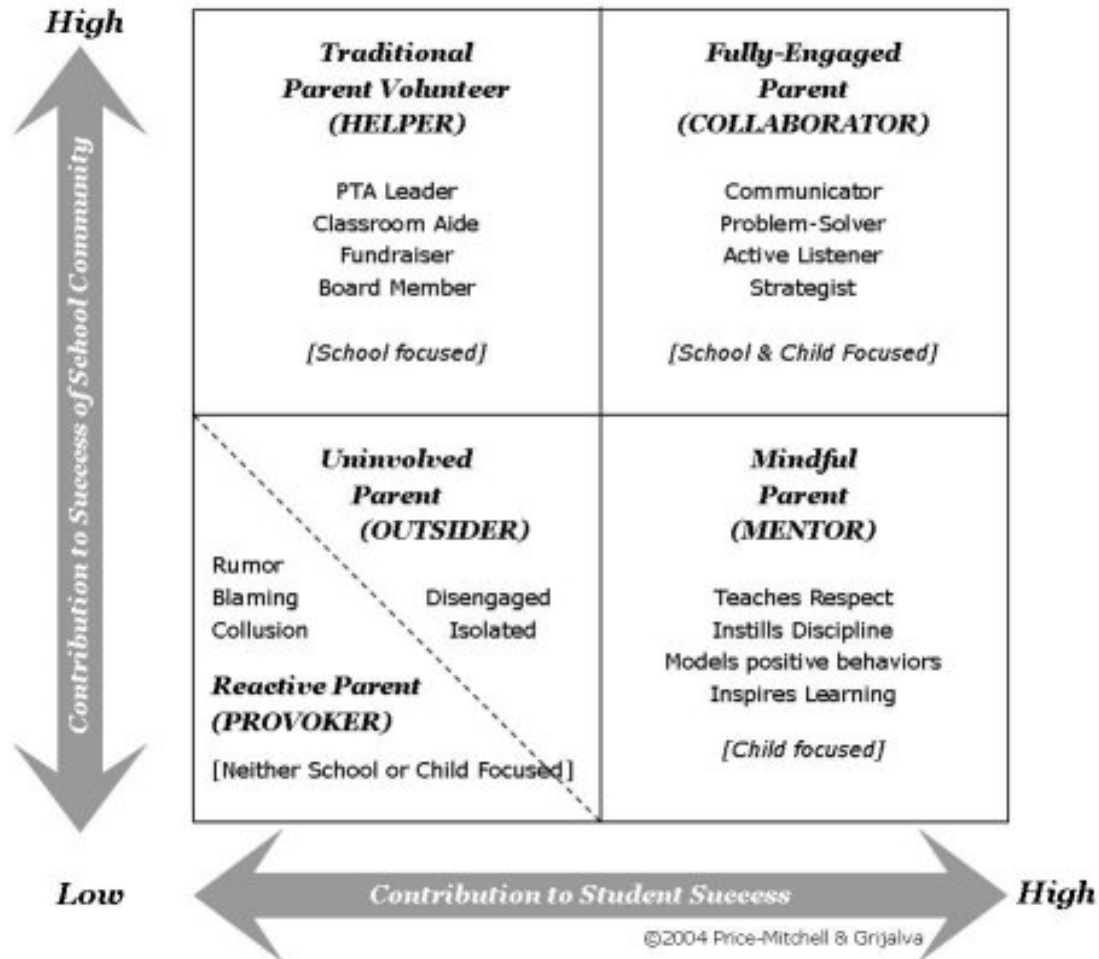
ParentNet's Methodology

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 harmful and other behaviors are helpful in building communities that nurture collaboration. The model below shows the types of behaviors that harm and help parent-school communities. Harmful behaviors can be transformed into helpful ones by people who consciously facilitate positive change. The skills taught to parent facilitators and modeled in ParentNet meetings help build collaborative school communities.



During our many years of working in schools, we began to realize that “parent involvement” could take many forms, both positive and negative. And we began to understand not only the importance of parent involvement in education but the type of parent involvement that makes the most difference in the academic, social, and emotional development of children. We identified five categories of parent behaviors within a school community. We believe that each category makes a corresponding contribution to the success of the school community and to student success.

DEVELOPING THE FULLY-ENGAGED PARENT
A Model for Understanding Parent Involvement in Education



Understanding the Model

In every school community, parent behaviors can be categorized into five groups. The categories are very fluid, that is, parents move from one group to another depending upon the situation and their level of involvement. Each category implicitly makes a contribution to the success of the school community and/or to the academic, emotional and social success of students.

Traditional Parent Volunteer

When we think of “parent involvement,” people immediately think of volunteering at school -- helping in the classroom, fundraising, chaperoning, etc. These “helper” parents are a vital part of a school community, without which many schools could not provide quality education or raise additional funds for needed programs and materials. In many schools, this type of traditional parent involvement is at a record low. New ways of recruiting “helpers” must be discovered. The Traditional Parent Volunteer contributes HIGHLY to the success of the school community but does not necessarily contribute to student success.

Reactive Parent

The “provoker” parent, instead of employing helpful behaviors to influence change, uses techniques such as blaming, rumor, collusion and gossip to achieve results. This reaction often occurs in a crisis situation with a child and can be the result of anger or their powerlessness to influence change in any meaningful way. Unfortunately, these harmful behaviors are often modeled to children. The Reactive Parent is a LOW contributor to the success of the school community and a LOW contributor to student success.

Uninvolved Parent

The “outsider” parent is generally invisible in the school community and is isolated from other parents. Some willingly choose to be uninvolved; others face overwhelming challenges in their family lives that leave them few options. Like the Reactive Parent, the Uninvolved Parent is a LOW contributor to school success and a LOW contributor to student success.

Mindful Parent

The “mentor” parent approaches parenting with conscious intention but does not necessarily get involved at their children’s school. They work hard to teach respect and instill discipline at home as well as model positive behaviors to their children. They often read books about parenting and try hard to teach family values to their children. The Mindful Parent is a HIGH contributor to student success but a LOW contributor to the success of the school community.

Fully-Engaged Parent

The “collaborator” parent understands the concept of “parent-school partnership,” acts in ways that facilitate its development, and recognizes that effective parenting cannot occur in isolation from other parents and the school. With a shared focus on parenting and the success of the school community, they are empathic listeners, communicators, and problem-solvers. They often seek support or advice from other parents and use teacher feedback to ensure their child is on track. Of course, this dual focus is an ever-shifting one. As issues emerge, with the child or with the school, the Fully-Engaged Parent may shift their focus accordingly. The Fully-Engaged Parent is a HIGH contributor to the effectiveness of the school community and a HIGH contributor to student success.

How ParentNet Develops Fully-Engaged Parents

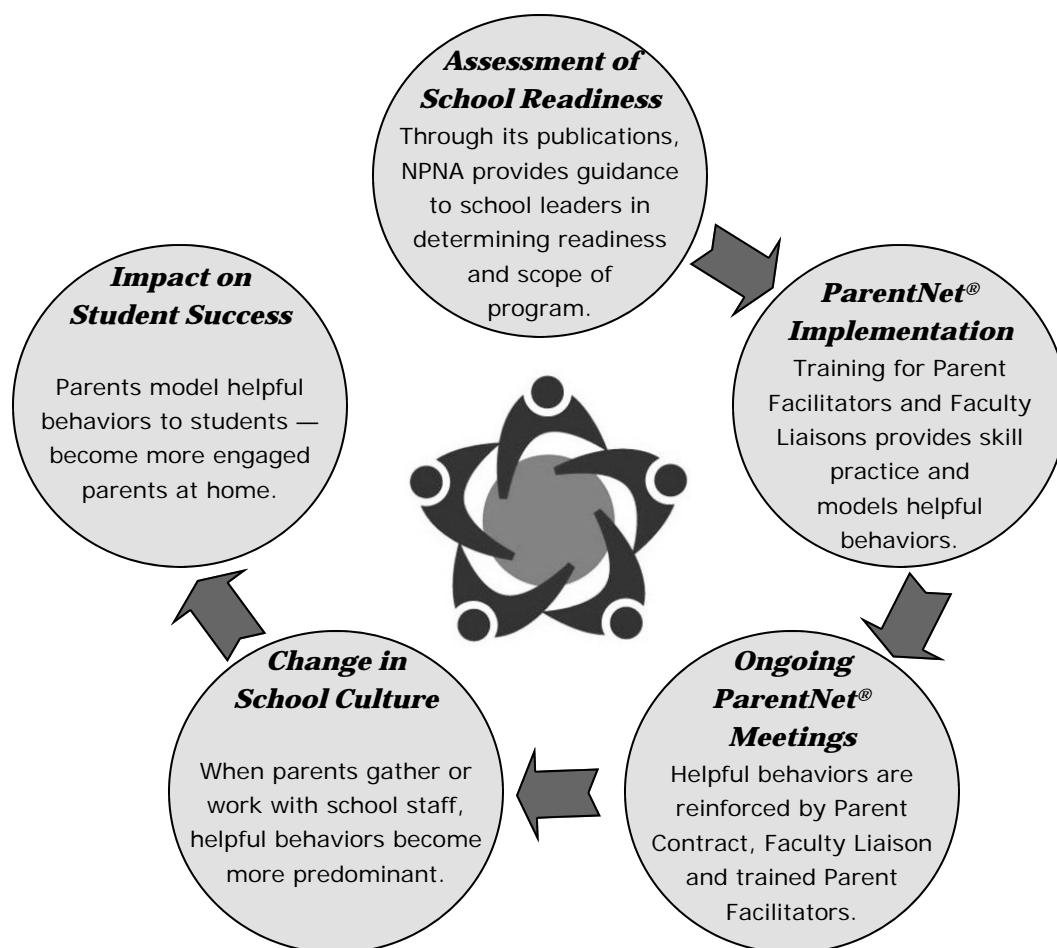
We believe the school must play a role in developing the Fully-Engaged Parent and that a great urgency exists in doing so. Countless numbers of today’s parents are either not able or willing to become Traditional Parent Volunteers at their child’s school. Since this is the only current path to formal “parent involvement” available to them, many become Reactive or Uninvolved Parents, roles that are equally unsuited to school and/or student success. Since many Mindful Parents are uninvolved in the school community, the helpful strategies they have learned about parenting are not shared synergistically with others. Most schools have no formal way to create Fully-Engaged Parents, except among the few parents at the top echelon of parent leadership.

ParentNet is one of the first programs of its kind to focus on this unmet need in American schools by providing a structure where *any* parent can become a fully-engaged one. By providing a formal structure to communicate about child rearing, share experiences, problem-solve, and create new solutions, all parents can become engaged members of the school community. As parents expand awareness of themselves and their parenting styles, they become more effective at modeling collaborative communication to their children. This type of communication is at the heart of successful parent-child relationships!

The potential pool for Fully-Engaged Parents is much greater than the pool for Traditional Parent Volunteers. Why? Whereas the “Helper” category can only draw from parents inclined to become Traditional Volunteers, the “Collaborator” can draw parents from all groups. The common reason they come together is to become better parents – a goal shared by most. Because ParentNet is behavior-based, it has the potential to change the behavior of many Reactive Parents, creating greater ability for them to become Fully Engaged Parents. Mindful Parents appreciate the opportunity to learn from others and grow in their parenting skills. They often become ParentNet facilitators and leaders for the program – a whole new crop of volunteers! ParentNet becomes another “door” through which parents become involved at school.

ParentNet has also been designed to increase “helpful behaviors” in the parent-school partnership which lead to organizational and personal effectiveness. Faculty Liaisons play an important role in helping parents learn about and navigate the school culture, understand school goals, and apply skills to influence student success. The Parent Contract subtly reinforces “helpful behaviors” that parents learn to model in other areas of their life. Simply stated, the process is outlined in the following model.

ParentNet® Methodology



Is ParentNet A Good Fit For Your School?

ParentNet requires a long-term commitment by your school to increase and improve parent involvement in a new and meaningful way. We recommend you take time to review our program and materials and decide if ParentNet is a good fit for your school. We suggest the following steps:

Understand the Program

- ◆ If you haven't ordered the ParentNet DVD from our online store, you may wish to consider doing so. More than any of our materials, the DVD brings ParentNet to life and tells you about the program from the perspective of real parents, teachers, administrators, students, and school counselors. It also lets you experience a shortened version of a real ParentNet meeting. Use the DVD as you share ParentNet with others at your school – your PTA/PTO, principal, parents, teachers, counselors, etc. It provides a consistent vehicle for communicating ParentNet's message.
- ◆ You may also wish to review our free online materials in "ParentNet Central." Supplementary materials to support your program can be purchased through our online store. The "ParentNet Volunteer Handbook" is used to train volunteer parent facilitators and the "ParentNet Training Manual" provides detailed workshop designs, structured activities, handouts, and resources to for ParentNet Facilitator Training.
- ◆ Review our website and invite others to do the same. It has a wealth of information, including much of the important research on parent involvement in education.

Get Your Questions Answered

The following represent a few of the most frequently asked questions about ParentNet. Other FAQ's can be found on our website.

What is the difference between ParentNet and the PTA or PTO?

PTA/PTO meetings typically focus on special events and fundraising to support school sports and clubs, and other costs not supported by the school budget. These are business meetings with business agendas. Although PTAs/PTOs provide avenues for parent involvement, they do not bring same grade-level parents together to learn how they can support the academic, social, and emotional development of their children. This is ParentNet's primary focus. In many schools, ParentNet becomes an official program of the PTA/PTO and is funded by them. However, some schools prefer to keep ParentNet organizationally separate from the PTA/PTO and position it as a new and unique parent-school collaboration.

How can we expect our parent community to change as a result of ParentNet?

Schools that have ParentNet report that their schools have increased overall parent participation, improved parent-school communication and are better able to connect parents with one another to form more unity at grade levels. At your first Facilitator Training, parents are asked to list ways they want their parent community to change as a result of ParentNet. Every school has different answers because each school community is unique. By verbalizing what you want to change, you begin a vision for change. Each year, you can use your list to check your progress toward your goal.

What types of schools have successfully implemented ParentNet?

ParentNet has been successfully launched in both private and public schools and at all levels -- elementary, middle, and high school. In its pilot phase, we greatly involved our member schools in program development and improvement and refined our training programs to meet the needs of parents and schools. You may read testimonials on our website.

How much of the School Principal's time will ParentNet take?

The quick answer -- almost none! This is a parent-implemented and led program. The most important factor for its success is a principal's belief in the value of this type of parent involvement and his/her support of the parents leading the effort. Principals usually talk about ParentNet at appropriate school events, ensure that faculty and staff understand the program, and help recognize parent volunteers.

Has ParentNet conducted research in schools to show improvement in parent involvement or student achievement?

To date, ParentNet has not conducted its own research in schools, other than to solicit feedback from parents, faculty, and administrators and to collect statistics on participation. We have thus far relied on the current research that shows a direct correlation between parent involvement and the facilitation of student intelligence, achievement, and competence. Our program has been particularly inspired by the research of Joyce Epstein of John Hopkins University, Ann T. Henderson of New York University, and the Search Institute of Minneapolis.

If this is a parent-led program, why do we need to have a faculty liaison attend ParentNet Meetings?

The faculty liaison role has proven to be vital to the success of ParentNet for several reasons. First, it provides parents with access to a "school voice" when they need to understand how to problem-solve or get additional information from the school that is important to them. Second, it is a way for the school to communicate information to parents regarding academic goals, school reform, policy, etc. It is also a great value to the school to know that ParentNet meetings are running smoothly and effectively.

How can the school be assured that ParentNet meetings won't turn into a gripe session about school or personnel issues?

The Parent Contract provides guidelines for discussion and stresses that ParentNet meetings are never a forum to argue school policy or curriculum issues nor a setting to discuss individual faculty and administrators. Volunteer parent facilitators and the ParentNet Faculty Liaison receive excellent training on how to reinforce this contract during meetings.

What kinds of parents volunteer for ParentNet? Can we expect to get any others than those who already volunteer for everything else at our school?

One thing that all our member schools have in common is that ParentNet has brought with it a new breed of volunteers to the school. This is not to say that current parent leaders have not been instrumental in launching ParentNet. However, this program is very different than most other volunteer jobs at school. Because the commitment of time for facilitators is quite reasonable and because ParentNet meetings are often held in the evenings, parents with full-time jobs can manage the time. Parents in the helping professions like therapists, social workers, and educators are often drawn to this type of work and enjoy the interaction with others.

What is the average parent participation at ParentNet Meetings?

Based on collected statistics from our schools, the average parent participation at ParentNet Meetings is about 30%. That means that in a class of 100 students, an average ParentNet Meeting is attended by 30 parents. Public school participation levels are generally lower than private school levels. Overall, participation levels are greater than most other types of parent involvement programs.

If we start the ParentNet program, can we adapt it to meet the needs of our school?

Absolutely! There is a lot of flexibility in ParentNet and we believe each school must use it with their own needs in mind. The only thing we insist upon when using the ParentNet name is that you use the Parent Contract, the ParentNet Volunteer Handbook, trained volunteers, and a faculty liaison.

Assess Your School Readiness

As you imagine ParentNet in your school community, you will need to consider the readiness of your parents, teachers, and school administrators to beginning such a program. Depending upon your assessment of the following, your strategy for implementation will differ.

Current Parent Involvement

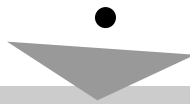
Parent involvement may look different in different schools. For example, it may mean that parents volunteer for a variety of traditional tasks, they show an interest in the school by attending school events, they step forward when asked to help out, or they have shown an interest in parent education. In our experience, ParentNet takes established parent involvement to a new, more meaningful level, improving communication; building community; and developing new leaders – mothers, fathers, and other caregivers -- who have not previously volunteered. A full-scale ParentNet launch works best in schools with a several year record of established parent leadership and involvement. If you enjoy moderate to high parent involvement, we encourage you to consider launching ParentNet gradually or school-wide, depending on your leadership. If your school has low parent involvement, you should consider taking smaller steps to prepare for school-wide ParentNet implementation.

Parent/Faculty Leadership

A strong PTA or other parent organization is helpful but not essential to launching a successful ParentNet program. The most important pre-requisite for school-wide implementation is that a school has at least a moderate cadre of parent leaders and several parents who come to mind as being the “right” people to lead ParentNet for its first two to three years. In schools with insufficient parent leadership, we suggest developing leadership through a small pilot project as outlined on page 18. Equally important is the availability and enthusiasm of one or more faculty liaisons who can regularly attend ParentNet meetings. These are often teachers or school counselors who are highly respected by parents and who wish to play a role in community-building.

Leadership Endorsement

It is essential to the success of ParentNet that its mission be endorsed by parent and school leadership. Although it is parent-led, the principal must be supportive of the concept and be willing to communicate his/her enthusiasm to parents and faculty. During the assessment period, you should be meeting with your principal, key parents, and other school leaders, discussing how this might work in your school, and ascertaining the timing for implementation. If your school is in the midst of crisis or leadership change, take that into consideration when looking at ParentNet. ParentNet is a very positive program that will hopefully become a permanent part of your school culture. Timing for such a program is important.



"Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children."

Goal 8 - National Education Goals

Parent Interest

Has your school ever sponsored parent education workshops or seminars? If so, how were they received by parents? Were they well-attended? Not that the answer to these questions is an exact predictor of ParentNet success but they do indicate a certain interest of parents in learning how to be better parents. Although ParentNet brings parents together in the school setting, its main goal is to increase the quality of parent involvement at home. According to research, this is the most important form of parent involvement in education – what parents do at home to improve the academic, social, and emotional development of their children. You can determine parent interest in numerous ways. Meet with your Parent Association, hold general information meetings about ParentNet, and talk informally to parents at your school. As you do this, record the names of parents who may be interested in becoming facilitators at their child's grade level. These are people you will contact later when you make a commitment to launch ParentNet. If you cannot ascertain parent interest because your school has low parent involvement, please see page 18 for suggestions.

Cultural Diversity

If your school is multi-cultural with non-English speaking parents, you will need to assess how ParentNet will work to include those parents. Our experience tells us that ParentNet meetings are best conducted in one language. This means that instead of meeting by grade-levels, you might consider having "Hispanic ParentNet" or "Vietnamese ParentNet" that spans several grades. You may need bi-lingual parent facilitators and people to translate publicity materials into various languages. What resources are in place that would help make ParentNet a success? What additional resources would you require? Combined with parent education, ParentNet can be a great vehicle for helping multi-cultural parents help their kids.

Choose a Strategy for Getting Started

There are many ways to launch ParentNet depending upon the needs of your school, its size, and other readiness criteria. Some of the ways include:

- ◆ Begin with a **Pilot Project** to cultivate leadership and interest. This is a great "first step" to launch in schools with low parent involvement or with a specific cultural group. See page 18 for details.
- ◆ Begin ParentNet in **one or two grades**. This works well in large schools and creates a model for grade expansion. It can also be used in schools where parent leadership is stronger at particular grade levels.
- ◆ Begin by **combining two to three grades** where children share similar developmental levels. This works well in small schools whose population may not be great enough to warrant individual grade-level meetings, or in schools who may question their ability to get sufficient numbers of volunteers or participants.
- ◆ **Launch a school-wide program**. If you have the parent leadership and interest as well as the support of your principal and other school leaders, there is no reason to hold back! Launching a school-wide program promotes great publicity and interest as well as generates new parent leadership.

"The depth and quality of parents' engagement in children's learning is greatly affected by support and encouragement from other parents. As our country becomes increasingly diverse, we can respond by reaching out across the lines of race, class and culture, as ParentNet enables families to do. Bringing parents together will strengthen our communities, as well as support higher student achievement."

Ann T. Henderson
Education Policy Consultant
New York University

*Author, "A New Wave of Evidence:
The Impact of School, Family and Community
Connections on Student Achievement"*

*Author, "Beyond the Bake Sale:
The Essential Guide to
Family-School Partnerships"*

Evaluate Financial Costs

The non-profit National ParentNet Association is committed to providing an affordable and accessible program to any school wishing to adopt the ParentNet model. There are no membership fees or annual costs to participate. Numerous free materials are available for download from Parent Involvement Matters.Org. However, like all programs, local costs will vary, depending on your use of volunteers and whether you pay for professional services and materials. The following is a guide to evaluating costs.

Facilitator Training—Facility

Parent Facilitators are trained each fall and usually meet again in the middle of each school year for skill-practice. This is normally held at your school facility, which is most often free of charge to parents. If a school facility is unavailable, check with local libraries that often have free space available for school and non-profit groups.

Facilitator Training—Handbooks

Each facilitator will need a copy of the ParentNet Volunteer Handbook. Low-cost copies are available from the ParentNet online store.

ParentNet Meetings

The ongoing cost of ParentNet meetings is quite minimal. Parents usually bring light refreshments, sometimes the PTA sponsors coffee/tea at meetings. There may, however, be some extra expenses, depending upon your individual school community and budget.

- ◆ **Easel/newsprint:** If your school doesn't already own an easel, consider the purchase of one for use at meetings. An alternative is to purchase newsprint and tape it to walls.
- ◆ **Preprinted ParentNet Flipcharts:** You can order a set of reusable flipcharts from our online store that can be used by all grades. These contain information that is reviewed at each ParentNet meeting. (Or you can make your own flipcharts.)
- ◆ **Childcare:** Some schools provide childcare during ParentNet meetings. Often, teens are used who volunteer for community service hours; some schools pay adults to do this work. This is an area you will need to examine for your individual school community.

"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."

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

End of Booklet Preview -- Order Entire Booklet as Part of ParentNet Starter Kit

Promotional Materials

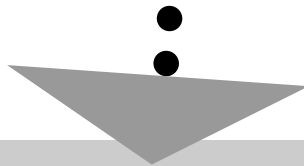
You will best know how to promote ParentNet in your school through already established lines of communication. The better you promote the program, the more people will attend. Depending on financial resources, you will want to consider the following:

- ◆ **ParentNet Brochures:** Most schools send the official ParentNet brochure to parents each school year along with a calendar of ParentNet meeting dates and names of grade-level leaders. Brochures can be ordered from our online store in packages of 100. Alternatively, you can produce your own brochure or flyer.
- ◆ **Miscellaneous Paper/Postage:** You will need a supply of paper, postcards, and postage to develop whatever kind of publicity you may require to advertise the program and your meetings to parents.

Professional Services

Depending upon the individual school and district you may need to budget for the following:

- ◆ **Faculty Liaisons:** Some schools pay their faculty liaisons for attending ParentNet Meetings, particularly when they are held in the evenings. Discuss this with your school principal to determine cost and if it will be covered by school budget.
- ◆ **Translator Services:** Some schools pay translators to help with communicating in a multi-lingual environment and/or to translate materials. Consult your school principal for guidance.
- ◆ **Professional Trainer:** If you don't have a parent volunteer or staff person who has experience in leading experiential training activities, you will want to find a professional trainer from your local community. This person will be responsible for leading practice skill-training sessions with volunteer facilitators. Check our online Consultant Directory for resources.



Sources of Potential Funding

Title I Funding

Some schools use Title I funding to support ParentNet. Contact your school office to inquire about this funding and whether it may be available to you.

Grants or Company Sponsorships

Small startup program grants are often available from local foundations or businesses. Or, ask a local company to sponsor your program.

School District Funds

Some school districts have funds designated for parent involvement programs or have Educational Foundations that support school programs. Contact your district office to inquire.

***A Sample Grant Proposal and Grant Resources
are available on our website in "ParentNet® Central".***