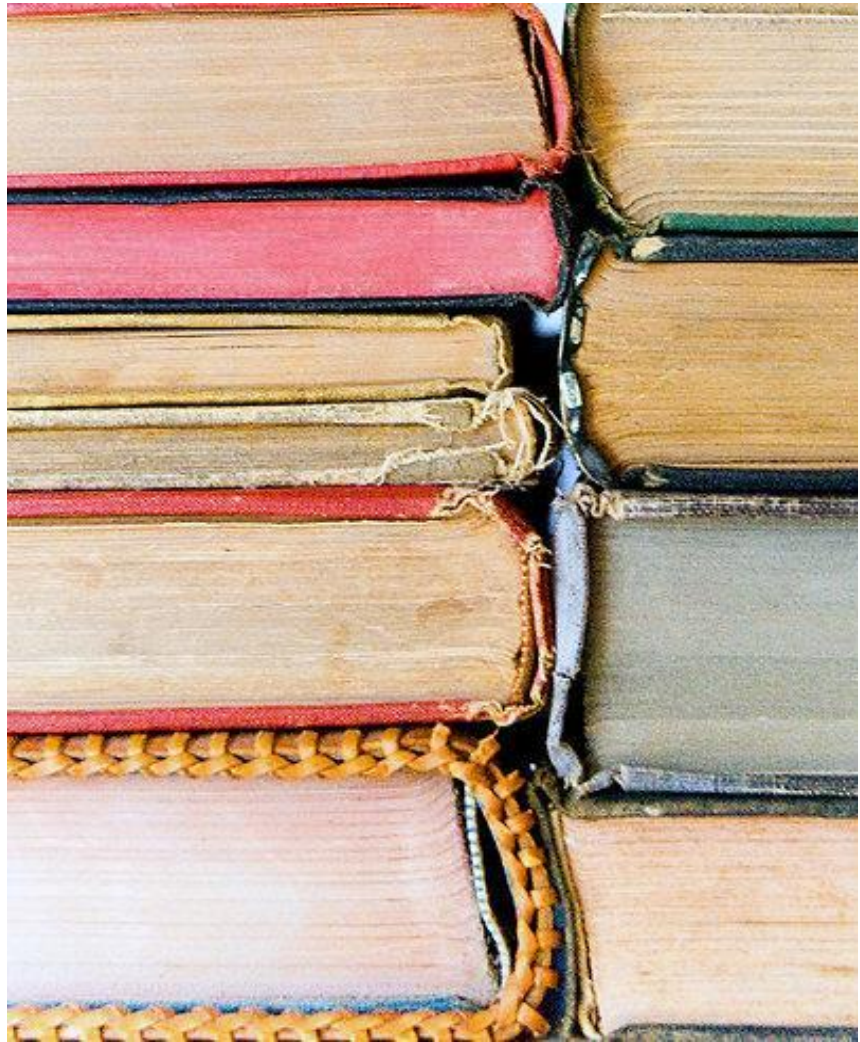


Parent & Family Center Resource Guide



Parent and family centers are a critical and essential resource in schools to engage parents as partners in their children's education.



PARENT COMMUNITY STUDENT SERVICES BRANCH

September, 2014

Parent and Family Center Handbook

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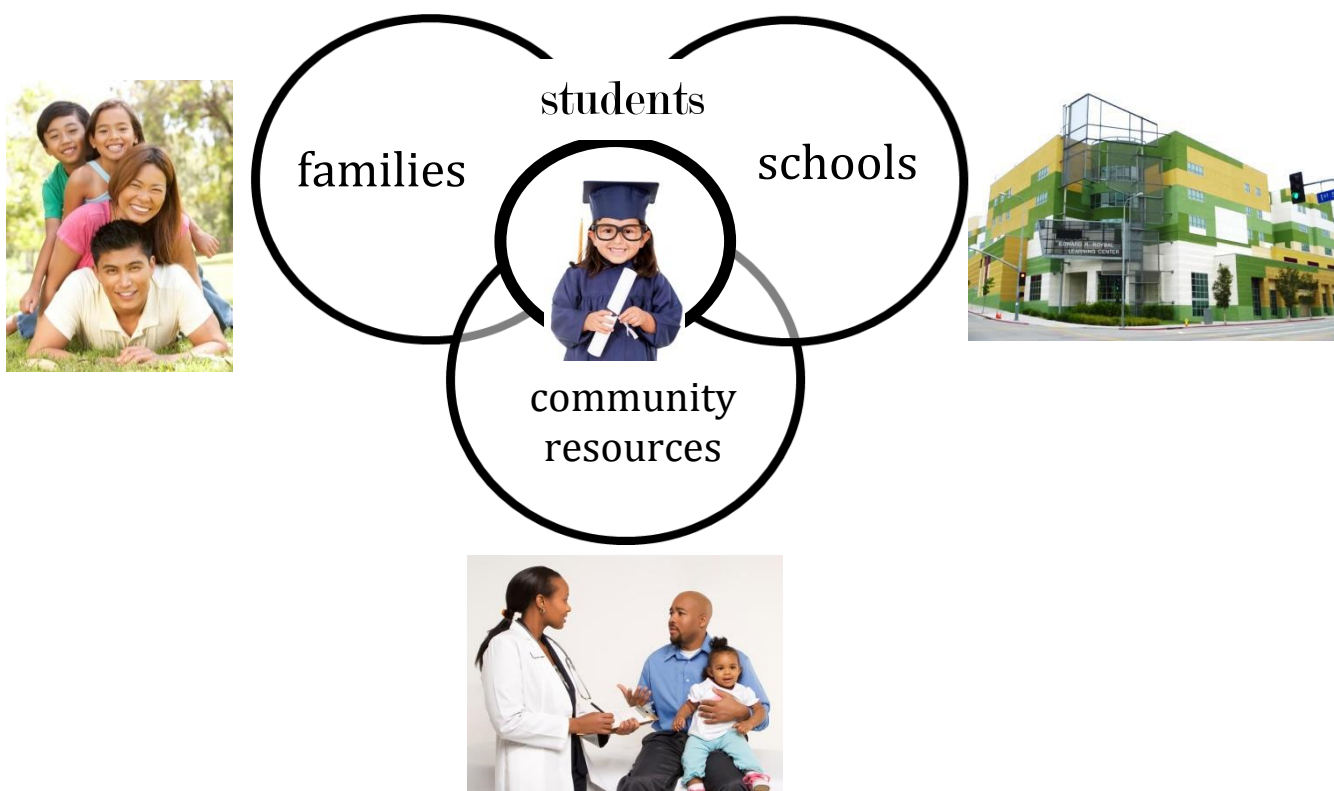
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What is a Parent and Family Center?

Parent and family centers are a critical and essential resource in schools to engage parents as partners in their children's education. An effective parent and family center serves as a parent classroom – a place where parents can learn about curriculum, community resources, communicating with teachers and school personnel, and ways to support their children's learning at home. Parents can also learn about the importance of the social and emotional well-being of their children and strategies and resources to support their development. The knowledge and skills that parents acquire at the parent and family center prepare them to be successful in their roles as their children's first and life-long teacher and advocates.

An important function of a parent and family center is to serve as an information hub to connect parents and families to community resources. When community organizations collaborate with schools and share their knowledge and expertise with parents, parents can use the information and share it with others. Using and sharing the information with other families prepares parents to assume leadership roles at home, school, and in the larger community.



Adapted from the NNPS Model of Overlapping Spheres of Influence, Epstein, J. L., et al. (2009).

Parent and Family Center Environment

The environment in a parent and family center is organized into two components – the physical environment and the instructional environment. The physical environment is critical since the way a parent and family center looks can impact how welcomed parents feel when they attend workshops and participate in school activities. The center should be a clean, inviting, and comfortable space. It is essential that parent and family center staff and volunteers who assist at the center are friendly and attentive to parents, family members, school staff, and community partners. Greeting everyone upon arrival in a friendly manner is imperative as this creates a positive first impression with new parents and shows returning parents and visitors that they are valued.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Signage

Placing friendly, welcome signs not only makes the parent and family center easy to find but also creates a welcoming climate. Parents should be able to easily locate the center and feel comfortable once they step inside. Signs should be in the various languages spoken by the school community.



A Clean and Organized Space

A parent and family center needs to be clean, organized, and uncluttered so that it can be an inviting and accessible place. The center is a parent classroom and its environment needs to be conducive to learning. Having furniture and materials well organized helps make activities flow smoothly and creates a comfortable environment for parents to learn, process, and exchange information and concepts.



Atmosphere and Attitude

The parent and family center needs to be a positive, helpful place where parents can ask for guidance. The center's staff is essential in making this happen. Staff should be knowledgeable, accessible, patient, and demonstrate willingness to help. Greeting parents in a friendly way, answering questions, and sharing resources are expectations of all center staff. Being courteous and able to work with diverse groups of people is important to ensure that parents and others who use the parent center feel valued and appreciated.

INSTRUCTIONAL ENVIRONMENT

The instructional environment should be positive and supportive. It should strengthen the school's instructional program. It outlines goals and highlights accomplishments. It engages parents and the community in reciprocal learning by providing diverse learning opportunities that are in accordance with the diverse needs of participants. It takes into account and celebrates cultural differences.

Children's Area

The children's area is designed for non-school aged children to play with age-appropriate toys and books while parents attend workshops and activities in the parent and family center. This space may include an area rug and age-appropriate furniture such as chairs, bookshelves, general shelving, and toy box.

When choosing the location for the children's area, it is important to choose an area visible and accessible to the parents so that they can see, hear, and care for their children.



Computer Station

An essential component of a high quality parent center is a computer area where parents can use the equipment to access student information, learn new skills, and read about parenting, supporting learning at home, college preparation, and other topics of interest. Training can be provided to parents on obtaining an email account and using the LAUSD PASSport (Parent Access Support System portal) to monitor their child's achievement and attendance.



Library Area



The library should contain books, magazines, DVDs, audio books, and other items that parents can use at the center or check out to use at home. The materials may cover many topics including parenting, supporting learning at home, communicating with teachers, and behavior strategies. It is helpful to have a comfortable seating area to provide a welcoming place for the parents to read or view the resource materials.

College Area

Parents can play a significant role in helping their students make informed decisions about their future. From an early age, parents should encourage their children to explore college and career options. A college area in the parent and family center is an excellent way to motivate parents to start or continue the conversations related to attending college.

The college area should be informative and inviting. It should contain a wide variety of information that includes A-G requirements, college applications, testing requirements, financial aid, scholarships, and career exploration resources.



Other Possible Instructional Areas:

- Cultural Awareness Area
- Instructional Media Area
- Home Learning Support Center
- Literacy Center
- Community Resources Area

Managing the Parent and Family Center

ORGANIZATION

The success of a parent and family center is based on effective planning and communication. Experienced parent and family center staff have identified key organizational tips.

Sign-in Table at Entrance to Center

Having a sign in table near the entrance helps to keep track of who uses the center and the purposes for the visits. A general sign-in form makes it easier for the school to assess the number of parents and family members who attend workshops and come to the center to obtain resources. To support school safety, the sign-in form should have a space for parents and others to indicate their arrival and departure times.



Calendar/Resource Board

An effective way to promote parent workshops, school activities, and events is to have a bulletin board in a highly visible place – near the center’s entrance if possible. An attractive, colorful, and uncluttered bulletin board will catch people’s attention.

Parent Center Staff Work Station

A parent and family center should have a work station for the parent center staff to plan and prepare materials such as presentations, calendars, flyers, and other tools. The work station needs to be equipped with a computer, printer, storage, office supplies, and ideally, a telephone.

Area for Refreshments

Providing simple drinks and snacks at parent workshops and activities contributes to a welcoming environment. It is helpful to have an area to prepare and serve simple beverages and refreshments. Donations may be obtained in order to provide the snacks

Parent and Family Center Management Notebook

Maintaining a notebook that includes announcements, agendas, sign-ins and evaluations is an excellent way to showcase the instructional program of any parent and family center. It serves as a record of the parent workshops and trainings that are provided throughout the year.



SAMPLE PARENT AND FAMILY CENTER LAYOUTS

