Session 1

What Does Family Involvement in the School System Mean to Each of us?

Part 1: Welcome and Introductions (10 minutes)

Facilitators will:
- Welcome participants and thank them for coming to the Study Circle.
- Introduce themselves and explain their role as facilitators.
- Ask participants to introduce themselves.
- Explain a little bit about the Study Circle program.
  - This is the first of four sessions.
  - There are several other Study Circles happening at the same time.
  - There will be an Action Forum following the four Study Circle sessions.
  - In the Action Forum all who participated in the Study Circles will prioritize actions to increase parental and community involvement in the school system.

Introduction to the Session – Facilitators Read: By coming to this Study Circle, we show that we care about students and education. The goal of this session is to get to know each other and to share some of our hopes and concerns about family and community involvement in our youth’s education. We will talk a little bit about how our families were or were not involved in our own education. We will also talk about some of the national standards for family involvement. Before we begin we will set up some ground rules for our discussion.

Part 2: Setting the Ground Rules (10 minutes)

Facilitator Reads - It is important that we agree on rules about how we will talk with and listen to each other. The rules will help our Study Circle work better. Here are some sample ground rules:
- Facilitator shows participants sample ground rules that are on the flip chart.
  - What ground rules would you add to this list?
  - Are there any ground rules on this list you don’t want to be included?
Part 3: How Have Our Lives Shaped Our Thinking About Family and Community Involvement in Education? (45 minutes)

Facilitators Read: Our own life stories often shape our ideas and beliefs. We will use this session to share parts of our life stories. We will begin by asking you some questions. Please be as open and honest as possible with each other as we have this discussion.

Discussion Questions:

➢ Think back. When you were in school, how was your family involved in your education?

➢ What was the relationship between your family, your teachers, and other school personnel?

➢ What do people in your family or community say about families being involved in education? Are the messages different today from when you were a student?

➢ What are your hopes and dreams when you think about schools, parents and community members working together on our youth’s education?

Part 4: What Should we Expect from Our Schools and Families? (30 minutes)

Facilitators Read – We’ve talked about what kind of experience we had and the experiences that we think students should have when families and community members are involved. Now let’s take some time to look at some national standards for parental involvement in schools.

The standards we will examine have been adopted by many schools and organizations such as the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA). We will read and discuss, one at a time, each of these six standards. We would like to have participants volunteer to read out loud the six standards. The questions for all the standards are found at the end of the first standard. We will use the same questions after we have read each standard.

National Family Involvement Standards

1. Parenting: FAMILIES provide for the health and safety of children and maintain a home environment that encourages learning and good behavior in school.  
   SCHOOLS provide training and information to help families understand their children’s development and how to support the changes their children undergo.
Discussion Questions

- What do our schools do to meet this standard?
- What makes it difficult for our school/families to meet this standard?
- What do we need to do better at meeting this standard?

2. Communication: SCHOOLS reach out to families with information about school programs and student progress. This includes the traditional phone calls, report cards, and parent conferences. It also includes information on topics such as school choice and making the transition from elementary school to higher grades. Communication is in a form that families find understandable and useful. For example, schools can use translators to reach parents who do not speak English well.

(Do Discussion Questions Above)

3. Volunteering: PARENTS can make significant, positive contributions to the environment and functions of a school. SCHOOLS can get the most out of this process by creating flexible schedules so more parents can participate and by working to match the talents and interests of parents to the needs of students, teachers, and administrators.

(Do Discussion Questions Above)

4. Learning at Home: With the guidance and support of teachers, family members can supervise and assist their children at home with homework assignments and other school-related activities.

(Do Discussion Questions Above)

5. Decision-making: SCHOOLS can give parents meaningful roles in the school decision-making process, and provide parents with training and information so they can make the most of those opportunities. This opportunity should be open to all segments of the community, not just people who have the most time and energy to spend on school affairs.

(Do Discussion Questions Above)

6. Collaboration with the Community: SCHOOLS can help families gain access to support services offered by other agencies, such as healthcare, cultural events, tutoring services, and after-school child-care programs. They also can help families and community groups provide services to the community, such as recycling programs and food pantries.

(Do Discussion Questions Above)
Part 3: Conclusion, and Getting Ready for Our Next Session (10 Minutes)

Facilitators:

- Briefly summarize what was discussed throughout the evening.
- Ask people to read, before they return, the Participant Tips on page 24 & 25 in the Guide.
- Explain that in the next session we will be discussing “Why are so many families not involved in our schools?”
- Thank people for coming and really encourage them to attend the next session.
Session 2

Why Are So Many Families Not Involved in Our Schools?

Welcome – Facilitator welcomes participants and thanks them for returning.

Introduction to the Session – Facilitators Read: In session 1, we talked about our own personal experiences with family involvement in our education. We also talked about some national standards for family involvement. In this session, we will talk about the reasons why so many families are not involved in their child’s education.

Part 1: Getting Started (10 minutes)

- Review Ground rules
  ➢ Does everyone still agree with the list of ground rules?
  ➢ Do we need to modify it?

- New News? - Since our last meeting, has anything happened that relates to this issue that you would like to share?

- Old Notes - Review any notes taken from the last session and briefly summarize those points.

Part 2: Exploring the Views of Family Involvement (90 minutes)

Facilitators Read: This session provides an opportunity to think about and discuss different views on the relationship between schools and families. We will look at four (4) views, each of which explores the school, family, community relationship from a different perspective. We may agree with each other on some points and we may disagree with each other on other points. It is OK to disagree with each other in this discussion. Use the four views to start your own thinking about what the current relationship between schools, families, and community is and how it affects student’s success in school.

Using the Views – Each view is written in the voice of a person who thinks it is a very important idea. Some views that are important to you might not be on this list. Feel free to add other views.

- Someone will read the view points out loud in both English and Spanish. (Participants or the facilitators can volunteer to do this.)

- The questions for discussion are found at the end of the four views.
View #1 – According to this view:
Families and schools need to have independent roles.

Some examples:

- Families feel that the school knows best how to educate children.
- The school believes that the most important role for families is to see that their child regularly attends school, in on time, rested, well-fed and ready to learn.
- The school believes its fundamental role is to prepare the students academically.
- Educating children is seen as the school’s responsibility

View #2 – According to this view: Some families have valid reasons for not being involved in their children’s education.

Some examples:

- There are families who do not speak English well and thus feel uncomfortable around schools.
- Family members who did not do well in school worry that they do not know how to help with school work.
- There are families who work long hours or who work more than one job. This leaves little time to help with school work or to be involved in their children’s schools.
- Technology is moving too fast for many families to be knowledgeable enough to help their children.

View #3 – According to this view: Schools and families find it difficult to work together.

Some examples:

- There are schools who do not do a good job of welcoming all families or fail to provide new ways to get families involved in their children’s learning.
- There are some families who do not act in the best interest of their children.
- Often the only contact between families and school is when a child misbehaves.
- “Family Involvement” may mean different things to schools than it does to families.
View #4 – According to this view:
Schools and families do not hold each other accountable for doing their “jobs”.

Some Examples:

- Some schools do not provide families with up-to-date regular reports on how the student is doing.
- Some families do not provide schools with accurate, up-to-date contact and health information for their children.
- There are families that do not believe that it is their responsibility to prepare or support their children in school.
- Schools and families do not invest time and resources in each other which leads to apathy and poor communication.

Discussion Questions

1. Which view(s) come closest to your own? Why?

2. What view (or examples from the views) do you see in your school?

3. What are some ways your school could make it easier for more families to be involved in their children’s education?

4. What are the advantages of each view? What are the disadvantages of each view?

Part 3: Conclusion, and Getting Ready for Our Next Session
(10 Minutes)

Concluding Questions: Facilitators please record thoughts to the following two questions:

- Where do we agree or disagree?
- What new insights did you gain today?

In our next session, we will look at approaches to improving how families, schools, and the community work together.
Before the next session you might ask other community members what goals they have for school, family and community partnerships.

We want to again thank you for coming tonight and ask you to please come to the next session.
Session 3

Picture a Community Where Schools and Families Work Together to Help All Students

Welcome – Facilitator welcomes participants and thanks them for returning.

Introduction to the Session – Facilitators Read: The last time we met, we talked about some of the reasons that schools and families do not work in partnership together. In this session we will explore:

• What our schools and community would look like if families were full partners in their child’s education.

Part 1: Getting Started (10 minutes)

• Review Ground rules
  ➢ Does everyone still agree with the list of ground rules?
  ➢ Do we need to modify it?

• New News? - Since our last meeting, has anything happened that relates to this issue that you would like to share?

• Old Notes - Review any notes taken from the last session and briefly summarize those points.

Part 2: Families, Schools and Communities Working Together, Six Views: (70 minutes)

Facilitators Read: We want our schools, communities, and families to help all of our students do their best. Let’s think about an ideal school. We are going to be reading five views about what makes up an ideal school.

Before we actually read the five views I would like for us to discuss for 15 minutes or so this question:

➢ What does family involvement in the school system mean to you?

Facilitators Read: Now let’s look at the five views on what an ideal school might look like.

• Volunteers will read all five viewpoints out loud in both English and Spanish. (Participants or the facilitators can volunteer to do this.)

• The questions for discussion are found at the end of the five views.
**View #1 – Communication between home and school is on-going, two way and meaningful:**

**Some examples:**

- Families are sent information about their child’s progress in subjects and skills.
- With input from families, schools develop and provide information on school policies, reforms, discipline procedures, school goals and assessment tools.
- Families share with schools what the background, culture, talents, goals and needs are of their child.
- Schools inform families of the expectations for students at every level of their education.

**View #2 – Families play a key role in helping their child learn.**

**Some examples:**

- Families create home conditions that support children as students at each age and grade level.
- Families enforce structure for their children’s lives (i.e., set time for bed and meals, monitor TV/Computer usage, use consistent discipline).
- Schools give information and training for parents on how to help their children in each subject and their overall educational experience.
- Families monitor their child’s homework and class work.
- Families ask questions and give feedback to teachers and vice versa.

**View #3 – Families are welcome in the school. Their support and assistance are encouraged and recognized.**

**Some Examples:**

- Parents feel welcomed by office staff, teachers, administrators, and other school personnel.
- Schools survey the interests and availability of parents who may wish to donate their time to the school.
- Schools and families work together to organize ways to use volunteers.
- Schools and parent organizations provide training to help families become involved.
Schools provide resources to help parents get involved, such as transportation and childcare.

Schools show appreciation for families’ volunteer efforts.

**View #4 – Families take part in the decisions that affect their children.**

**Some Examples:**

- All families have access to the correct process of influencing and appealing decisions.
- All families are encouraged to raise issues of concern and schools respond to their concerns.
- Schools involve families on committees or advisory councils concerning policies, curriculum, budget and school reform.
- School personnel and parents participate in trainings which teach them how to work together in the decision-making process.

**View # 5 – Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families and student learning.**

**Some Examples:**

- Service resources within the community are documented and distributed to school personnel and families.
- Partnerships are developed with organizations and businesses to support education, schools and family involvement.
- Employers adopt policies which help to promote a families involvement in their child’s education.
- Schools and families encourage all students to do community service projects.
- Schools encourage community members to participate as volunteers to help children and families.

**Discussion Questions**

1. What other ideas would you add?

2. Which ideas seem most important to you? Why? What effect would these ideas (the ones you feel are most important) have on you and or your family and school?

5. Which of these ideas would be easy to do? Which would be harder?

6. Think about an idea that is not so important to you. Why would someone else think that idea is important?
Part 3: What are we already doing that is working? (25 minutes)

Facilitators Read: We have talked about why so many families are not involved in their child’s education, and we have talked in this session about some of the ideals that could be found in a strong family, community and school partnership. Now let’s talk about what our school and community are already doing to help build partnerships with families.

Discussion Questions:

1. What things do you know our school system is already doing that increases family and community involvement in the schools.

   ➢ Facilitators should record the things listed by participants.

2. Do you know of things other schools or other communities are doing to increase family and community involvement in the schools?

   ➢ Facilitators should again record ideas.

3. What things that are already being done are working? How could it be even better?

Part 4: Conclusion, and Getting Ready for Our Next Session (10 Minutes)

Concluding Questions: Facilitators please record thoughts to the following two questions:

➢ In our discussions this evening where do we agree or disagree?
➢ What new insights did you gain today?

In our next session, we will come up with lots of actions we think would improve the partnerships between schools, community and families. We will also prioritize those ideas in to three types of actions:

➢ What our families can do
➢ What our schools can do
➢ What our community can do

We want to again thank you for coming tonight and ask you to please come to the next session.
Welcome – Facilitator welcomes participants and thanks them for returning.

Introduction to the Session – Facilitators Read: In Session #3 we talked about the ideal school, community and parent relationship. Now let’s talk about specific action ideas for helping to create that ideal situation in our own community. When we are thinking of actions to take we will divide them into three types of actions:

- What our families can do
- What our schools can do
- What our community can do

After we have created a list of possible actions in each of these three areas we will decide which four of these ideas are the most important. We will take these four ideas to the Action Forum, on November 4th.

Part 1: Getting Started (10 minutes)

- Review Ground rules
  - Does everyone still agree with the list of ground rules?
  - Do we need to modify it?

- New News? - Since our last meeting, has anything happened that relates to this issue that you would like to share?

- Old Notes - Review any notes taken from the last session and briefly summarize those points.

Part 2: Thinking About Ways to Make a Difference: (60 minutes)

Facilitators Read: We are going to begin by reading (in Spanish and English) a series of actions that could be taken by individuals or families. We will discuss these ideas and add our own ideas. After we have discussed these ideas we will read a list of actions that could be taken by schools and communities. We will discuss each set of possible actions and again add our own ideas.

Facilitators Note:

- Ask volunteers to read the following action ideas.

- Discussion Questions are found at the end of each set of action ideas.

- Record participants ideas of what actions they think would work best as well as any new ideas they suggest.
Action Ideas for Families and Individuals:

- Start teaching your child early. Talk to other parents and educators about what you can do to educate your child before they begin school.

- Get to know how schools work. Learn about school standards, goals and testing. Find out what, when and how things get done in schools.

- Let your child’s teacher know about your child (special needs, talents, behaviors, etc.)

- Find out about tutors, counselors, and other kinds of student support at school.

- Ask to be included in decision making committees for school.

- Attend all parent/teacher meetings. Stay in touch with teachers all year long.

- Be sure that your children are fed, clean, well rested, and ready to learn each day.

- Monitor your child’s homework as often as possible.

- Talk to your child’s teacher at each grade level about what it is your child needs to learn.

- Show your child’s teachers how much you appreciate them.

Discussion Questions:

1. Which action ideas from this list do you like the best? We will record which ideas you liked best on the flip chart.

2. What new ideas would you add to this list? Let’s take a minute and brainstorm additional ideas you think might be possible for families or individuals to take. We will record these ideas as you suggest them.

Action Ideas for our Schools (teachers, administrators, and school support staff):

- Offer a class for parents which provides information on student learning, community resources, school policies, etc.

- Reach out to all families, not just those you see on a daily basis.

- Hold family conferences at least twice a year at a time and location that is convenient for the family. Offer parents support in the way of child care, transportation, and translators.

- Provide bilingual information and outreach on a consistent basis.
Sponsor trainings on parenting skills and on how families can help their children with homework, meet class expectations and perform well on assessments.

Ensure that staff greetings, school signage, and other interactions help families feel valued and welcomed.

Provide information on a variety of ways families can volunteer to support their school. Inform them of tasks they can do in their home as well.

Develop partnerships with local businesses and service groups to help advance student learning.

Publish a newsletter that honors parents for their involvement.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Which action ideas from this list do you like the best? We will record which ideas you liked best on the flip chart.

2. What new ideas would you add to this list? Let’s take a minute and brainstorm additional ideas you think might be possible for schools to take. We will record these ideas as you suggest them.

**Action Ideas for the community:**

- Continue the study circles. Find ways for everyone (families, school staff, and community members) to keep talking about how to help all students do well in school.

- Begin a “Partners in Education” program that links businesses with schools to enhance education for students and families.

- When students have been suspended, give them opportunities for service learning and ways to keep up with their school work.

- Invite community “Experts” to help develop, improve and sustain school and family partnerships.

- Reward and honor teachers who improve school and family partnerships.

- Start support teams for families to help their children & school.

- Gather donations and materials for family learning kits to support positive parenting practices.

- Tell everyone willing to listen about the positive things happening at the school for students, families, and staff.
Discussion Questions:

1. Which action ideas from this list do you like the best? We will record which ideas you liked best on the flip chart.

2. What new ideas would you add to this list? Let’s take a minute and brainstorm additional ideas you think might be possible for the community to take. We will record these ideas as you suggest them.

Part 3: Setting Priorities for the Action Forum. (25 minutes)

Facilitators Read – Now we are going to look at all of the ideas we said we like and choose four of these that we like the very best. We will take these four ideas to the Action Forum on November 4th. Here is how we will choose our four ideas to take to the Action Forum.

1. We will start by looking at the Family Action ideas that we wrote down. If some of the ideas say the same thing we will combine them. Next we will do the same for school and community actions.

2. Now I would like you to look at all the ideas from all three categories and choose the top 10 ideas that you think are the most important. It does not matter if all 10 of your favorite ideas are from one category BUT you only get 10 votes. I would like you to write your 10 choices on a piece of paper.

3. I will give you each 10 voting dots. Please go to the wall and place your voting dots next to the 10 ideas that you have chosen.

4. Now let’s look at how we voted. We will re-write on a clean sheet of paper the eight (8) or nine (9) ideas that received the most votes.

5. Now I want you to again vote. This time you will get three votes. Please write down on your paper the three ideas you think are the most important ideas. Now please take your three voting dots and vote.

6. Let’s look to see what four ideas received the most votes. These four ideas will be the ones we will present at the Action Forum.

Part 4: Preparation for the Action Forum and Conclusion of Study Circle. (20 minutes)

Facilitators Read: We want to sincerely thank you for participating in this Study Circle. We want to close this session by letting you know some details about the Action Forum and then asking a couple of final questions.
Action Forum

- The Action Forum will take place on November 4\textsuperscript{th}. (Give time & place) We want everyone who has participated in each of the Study Circles to come to the Action Forum. At the Action Forum we will examine all of the ideas from each Study Circle group. In the large group we will determine which ideas we think are the most important. After we have determined what we think is most important we will begin planning. In the planning process we will decide what things we need to do to, when we will do them and who will do them.

We hope that all of you will be able to attend the Action Forum. We need to choose one or two people from our group to be our spokespersons for the Action Forum. The spokespersons will present our four action ideas at the Action Forum. Who should we select to do this?

Final Questions

- What have you learned as a result of participating in the Study Circle?

- What has made the biggest impact on how you think and act?

Concluding Remarks

- Is there anyone else who would like to say anything before we go?

- We want to again thank you for participating in this Study Circle. We look forward to seeing you at the Action Forum on November 4\textsuperscript{th}.