

Opportunities to Get Involved



How can I get involved?

All families have made decisions about their child's care, health and education, whether they realize it or not! Decision-making is an important way for families to be included and heard in the community.

Making a Difference

Once you feel comfortable with the processes that have helped make a difference for your own child, you may choose to reach out and make a difference for other children and families.

It is important to match issues you care about to the decision-making group with the authority to address the issue. This guidebook will help you focus your efforts and take action.

Did you know?

Researchers have found that better decisions are made about programs and services for children when families are involved.

RELATED RESOURCES

For more information about *fostering parent & professional collaboration*, visit:

<http://www.parentcenterhub.org/repository/improve-parent-professional-communication/>

Families Ask Questions

What levels of decision-making can parents be involved in?

"It depends on the group. The most effective groups have families involved at all levels. Even if families haven't been deeply involved before, don't shy away from seeking involvement."

-Courtney, non-profit administrator

"Overall, our district involves parents at almost all levels. In our recent interview process for a new elementary principal, there was a parent feedback group. We have a Parent Liaison that acts as an advisor on various committees. Parents are represented on our committee looking at our "High School of the Future." Parents are also involved in the development of the District 2025 Strategic Plan."

-Robyn, school district administrator

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How can I share in decision-making?

Shared decision-making is really just a way to explain the process that a group goes through to make decisions that include many perspectives and allows many voices to be heard. There are both formal and informal ways groups work together.



Shared decision-making

Shared decision-making is about the entire group, not one person, making decisions. When interested individuals, (also called stakeholders) share in the work of the group, better decisions are made and better outcomes can be expected.

When members of a group have an increased



sense of ownership in the work of the group, this may result in a greater commitment of time and energy to the work of the group.

Some groups come together to work on broad issues that affect many families. Some groups focus on a specific child. In both cases, families need to contribute to the discussion.

RELATED RESOURCES

For more information about *accessing parent groups*, visit:

[http://www.parentcenterhub.org/
repository/parentgroups/](http://www.parentcenterhub.org/repository/parentgroups/)

Words of Wisdom

"Select, volunteer, and access opportunities and invitations to serve on decision-making bodies wisely. Don't over extend or be afraid to accept an opportunity because it is something you have never experienced before."

-Une-Ta, parent

"No one brings to the table the same experiences or thoughts that you do. They are unique and it is necessary for you to share them so others can begin to understand or have another reference point. There won't always be agreement, but a better understanding. A new way of thinking about something can be powerful and may change things for the next person."

-Kara, parent

"Sometimes, I have felt intimidated because I didn't think I had as much knowledge and expertise as some other members of the group. What I found was that lots of different information needs to come to the table and be considered."

-Dawn, parent

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Who can serve on these groups?

It is important for families to be part of a group, especially if the group's decisions will be affecting the family in one way or another.



Are you interested?

If you are interested in finding a group to serve on, contact your child's school, school district, local or county offices, or statewide parent organizations. They will be able to guide you to a group you may be interested in joining.

Choose your opportunity wisely

There are many opportunities to serve on groups. Your time is valuable. You will want to find an opportunity that is meaningful to you. To make sure your time is productive, carefully consider your options before agreeing to serve.

You will want to consider:

- the amount of time you have available to serve
- the energy it will take to fulfill the responsibilities of the role

Families Ask Questions

I can't put my finger on one issue I want to make a difference about.

"Asking the right questions can help you target issues to work on. To make your time productive, find out if the group you are agreeing to serve on has decided to take action and make a difference on the issues you care about."

-Dawn, parent

"If you are having a hard time deciding on an issue, try out an online group first. Contact the organizations for recommendations on free online groups where people concerned with the same issues exchange information and ideas."

These online discussion groups are often a great starting place to see if this is the right issue for you. An online group may lead you to a more formal group in your community."

-Jane, parent

RELATED RESOURCES

For more information on the *National Standards for Family-School Partnerships Implementation Guide*, visit:

http://www.pta.org/national_standards.asp

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Where do I begin?

You may care deeply about many issues. Usually families get involved in decision-making groups when they see something that needs to improve or change.

Learn about resources and services.

Learning about the resources and services that families may access gives you an opportunity to find out what you want to see changed. Then you can think about what decision-making group will help to make that change happen. To learn more about resources and services for families, contact your state's parent center (found at www.parentcenterhub.org) or one of the organizations listed in the back of this guidebook.

Find an issue you care deeply about.

If you discover an issue you feel passionately about, you will have taken the first step to making a difference in the lives of children and families.

Connect to a group with the ability to make changes.

The next step is to find the right group with either the authority to make needed improvements or changes or the ability to influence the direction that the authority might take.

Prepare yourself to serve.

In section 2, we will describe types of groups you may choose to serve on. This information may help you select a group and prepare you for serving on the group.

Putting It Into Action

John is a stay at home dad who has three children, one of which is a daughter with Down Syndrome. He is involved in his daughter's middle school parent organization and attends school board meetings on a regular basis. He actively seeks opportunities to volunteer his time because he believes that the voice of the district families' needs to be considered in all decisions.

Laura works full time outside the home as an accountant. She has two children. One of our children has Attention Deficit Disorder with Hyperactivity and is a struggling reader. Some evenings, especially during tax season from January through April, are spent at work. She and her husband make time each evening to help their children with homework. She is very concerned with her 2nd grade son and most recently has been in regular communication with his teachers because of problems at school.

John and Laura were approached by their child's school principal to serve on the district's Reading Improvement Committee. Both are very interested in the committee. John readily jumps at the opportunity to serve on the committee. Laura needs time to consider whether she has the time available and the energy to fulfill the responsibilities. After consideration of these factors and discussion with her husband, Laura agrees to serve on the committee too.

