Making the Most of School-Family Compacts

Wouldn’t it be great if the administrators and teachers at a school—particularly a school with many at-risk students—could sit down with parents and exchange ideas about what part each might play in supporting students’ learning? Imagine if parents could hear directly from teachers what teachers believe their kids most need to learn, how teachers plan to structure that learning, and precisely what parents can do at home to reinforce it. What if teachers could hear each caregiver’s view on what most helps his or her particular child? And what if this meaningful interaction could happen through an existing protocol, one that most schools now perceive as a burdensome requirement?

As staff members in Connecticut’s Department of Education and as consultants on school-family collaboration, we’ve worked with several elementary schools that initiated such meaningful conversations by transforming school-family compacts, which all Title I Schools are required to create, from boilerplate language into vehicles for collaboration. Creating the compact became a catalyst for authentic school-parent cooperation.

A Missed Opportunity—Seized in Connecticut

No Child Left Behind stipulates that each school in the Title I program must develop an agreement, or “compact,” that outlines how parents, school staff, and students will share responsibility for improving academic achievement. Compacts
describe how the school and parents can work together to help students achieve the state’s standards. For most schools, compacts are a missed opportunity. As Judy Carson—who supports family engagement in Connecticut schools—found in reviewing compacts submitted by the state’s schools, such documents rarely described activities that directly affect learning. Most compacts parroted general language in the law about parents’ responsibility to support children’s learning, for example, by monitoring their school attendance or their TV watching. And most were gathering dust on the shelf. This is true across the United States; a report from the U.S. Department of Education concluded that the parent involvement requirements, including compacts, are one of the weakest areas of Title I compliance (Stevenson & Laster, 2008).

Research shows that all students benefit from family involvement in education, and low-income and minority students benefit the most (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Most parents want timely information about school goals and learning strategies so they’ll know what to do at home to support their children’s achievement. This is the kind of information compacts were intended to provide—but a document asking parents to pledge that they’ll get their kids to bed on time doesn’t provide it. So Carson and several colleagues in Connecticut’s Department of Education decided that if school-family compacts have to be created, schools should use the process to spark authentic conversations and listen to parents’ ideas about learning.

Imagine if parents could hear directly from teachers what teachers believe their kids most need to learn.

In 2008, the department initiated a program to improve school-parent compacts, bringing several consultants onto their team. This team designed a training curriculum, “A New Vision of Title I School-Parent Compacts,” that they offered as free professional development for Connecticut’s urban school districts. Connecticut launched the effort with a Compact Con-
When Romeo first heard about the need to improve Title I compacts, “To be honest, I groaned,” he admitted. The school’s compact hadn’t been revised in a while and was sitting on the shelf. But the school needed to work more closely with families to close the achievement gap between its middle-class and low-income students. Romeo realized that co-creating a compact was a way to start; so he assembled a team of teachers, curriculum specialists, and parents to take this on.

Drawing on what they learned at the 2008 Compact Conference and on help from consultant Patti Avallone, Macdonough’s teachers invited families to family-friendly evening learning events, such as an author’s tea, organized by grade level. Romeo confessed, “We were afraid if we mentioned compacts they’d stay away. We enticed them with a fun event featuring their children.”

After each activity, teachers pulled parents into the library and asked them to share ideas on improving students’ reading. Romeo talked to the group about grade-level goals, and teachers showed parents what reading instruction looked like in their child’s grade. Families met in small groups, with a Macdonough staff member guiding each group’s conversation. To encourage parents to open up, teachers asked, What advice would you offer next year’s parents to support children’s reading? Ideas poured out: Visit the library once a month, spend family time reading, write letters to other family members. “Teachers were impressed with parents’ ideas and their obvious commitment to learning, and parents’ eyes were opened to the school’s intense focus on reading,” Romeo recalled.

These gatherings were not a one-shot deal. After these initial conversations, teachers took parents’ ideas and drafted compacts. There was a lot of back and forth at grade-level meetings between parents and teachers. For example, teachers told parents that they wanted to send home reading materials with students each night to help students get into the habit of reading and that they’d like parents to monitor and guide their reading progress.

### Sample School-Family Compact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1st Grade Teachers Will</th>
<th>1st Grade Families Will</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>■ Conduct daily small-group reading instruction.</td>
<td>■ Make reading a daily part of family time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Read aloud each day to students.</td>
<td>■ Ask children questions about books they’re reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Provide take-home reading materials for students.</td>
<td>■ Visit the local library on a regular basis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Provide homework that supports topics learned at school.</td>
<td>■ Complete homework assignments with students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Take weekly trips to the school library.</td>
<td>■ Attend family literacy events at Macdonough School.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Keep families informed of children’s reading progress and ways to support learning at home.</td>
<td>■ Stay in touch with teachers about reading progress.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Macdonough Elementary School, Middletown, Connecticut

---

**Reaching Out to Wary Parents**

Macdonough Elementary School in Middletown, Connecticut, serves 80 percent low-income students (the highest percentage in the Middletown School District). In 2008, Macdonough had high staff turnover and a reputation for being a “not-so-good” school in a run-down, working-class neighborhood. Although the school had recently improved under the leadership of principal Jon Romeo, word had not gone out beyond the immediate neighborhood. A redistricting plan to improve racial balance was poised to move one-fourth of the district’s elementary students to different schools, including moving many new kids to Macdonough. Parents packed school board meetings to express concerns.

Romeo realized that Macdonough had to create positive relationships with new families fast and assure them that it would provide high-quality academics. When Romeo first heard about the program to improve Title I compacts, “To be honest, I groaned,” he admitted. The school’s compact hadn’t been revised in a while and was sitting on the shelf. But the school needed to work more closely with families to close the achievement gap between its middle-class and low-income students. Romeo realized that co-creating a compact was a way to start, so he assembled a team of teachers, curriculum specialists, and parents to take this on.

Drawing on what they learned at the 2008 Compact Conference and on help from consultant Patti Avallone, Macdonough’s teachers invited families to family-friendly evening learning events, such as an author’s tea, organized by grade level. Romeo confessed, “We were afraid if we mentioned compacts they’d stay away. We enticed them with a fun event featuring their children.”

After each activity, teachers pulled parents into the library and asked them to share ideas on improving students’ reading. Romeo talked to the group about grade-level goals, and teachers showed parents what reading instruction looked like in their child’s grade. Families met in small groups, with a Macdonough staff member guiding each group’s conversation. To encourage parents to open up, teachers asked, What advice would you offer next year’s parents to support children’s reading? Ideas poured out: Visit the library once a month, spend family time reading, write letters to other family members. “Teachers were impressed with parents’ ideas and their obvious commitment to learning, and parents’ eyes were opened to the school’s intense focus on reading,” Romeo recalled.

These gatherings were not a one-shot deal. After these initial conversations, teachers took parents’ ideas and drafted compacts. There was a lot of back and forth at grade-level meetings between parents and teachers. For example, teachers told parents that they wanted to send home reading materials with students each night to help students get into the habit of reading and that they’d like parents to monitor and guide their reading progress.
children’s nightly reading. Parents were willing, but they asked the teachers to “tell us exactly what you want us to work on and how we can help.”

Teachers were surprised; they’d never thought of telling parents what strategies they used in class. Teachers showed parents, for instance, about making text-to-self connections with books. Once parents learned that relating what their kids were reading to something in their lives—like comparing a character’s trip to a recent family trip—is motivating and helps comprehension, they said, “Oh, we can do that.” Through such exchanges, many people had their fingerprints on the finished compacts (see “Sample School-Family Compact,” p. 50).

As redistricting went into effect, Macdonough used the momentum to promote relationships. Teachers took walks in the neighborhood, during which they gave books to families and discussed improvements to the school. A back-to-school picnic enabled teachers and parents to socialize informally. At the school’s annual open house, teachers shared concrete information about what students would be learning and doing in class. School staff met with new families to invite them to help the school become the best it could be, using the compacts to explain how families might help improve student success in reading.

News began to spread that the school was improving. In 2008, a state advocacy group named Macdonough one of the 10 most improved schools in Connecticut.

Bringing Reading Strategies Home

At M. D. Fox Elementary School in Hartford, literacy coaches Rosana Bannock and Elise Francis initiated the compact-creating process. The school serves 900 children; 70 percent are Latino, and many others are refugees from Bosnia, Thailand, and Laos.

Through flyers and personal phone calls, Bannock and Francis invited parents to a meeting in the school’s library that featured a presentation on developing compacts and how important parents are to the process. After the presentation, parents broke into groups according to their children’s grade level. Teachers shared with each group tips they could use to help their kids succeed in school, and then asked two questions: What do teachers need to do to help students? and What can the school do to help parents support their children?

Bannock and Francis circulated the parents’ ideas to other Fox parents, who checked off the ideas most important to them. Teachers identified recurring themes that they used to construct the final compact for parents’ approval. The exchange was a learning process, noted Francis. “We had assumptions about what parents know and can do [to help children learn], and they’re much more willing to do things than we thought.”

Bannock explained how the discussions boosted school attendance:

Parents know their kids need to get to school on time, but single moms with four and five kids are struggling. As a result of the compact conversations, teachers have more sympathy for what families are going through, and grandparents are filling in to help kids get to school.

Teachers designed specific activities for different grade levels in response to parents’ suggestions. For example, parents said they didn’t understand what children learn in kindergarten—
do they just play or do they learn to read? Teachers responded with a three-day kindergarten orientation for parents at which they gave parents learning materials and showed them how to support reading at home. An astounding 95 percent of families came.

Pushing For Pride in Student Work
Renata Lantos, principal at Bielefield Elementary School in Middletown, also had students’ reading on her mind.

Bielefield’s attendance zone is the largest in the Middletown district, and more than one-half of its students are from low-income families. Although reading achievement is now improving steadily, at the time of compact creation, it was below average for the state.

After attending the Compact Conference, Lantos realized she and her staff had to revise their compact, which consisted of general compliance statements. Two teachers developed a presentation for families that explained the schools’ reading goals. They linked practical strategies for improving reading skills to these goals and showed how these strategies could be outlined in the compact.

For example, Bielefield teachers now assign each student books that fit that student’s reading level. Teachers have agreed to help students select “just-right books” and provide parents with reading materials connected to the books each week; parents agree to ensure that their children read regularly, encourage them to share and use new vocabulary, and use the materials the teacher sends home to have “book talks.” Students agree to read these books regularly, keep a reading record, and build a list of new words they learn.

During follow-up conversations, a major issue came up: Students needed to take more pride in their work. They were handing in subpar work that showed a lack of motivation. “The whole building got involved,” recalls Lantos. “Parents had great ideas, such as focusing on ‘pride in work’ in the newsletter and exhibiting student projects.”

At each grade level, students discussed what taking pride in your work means.

Teachers constructed a rubric that pinpointed three levels of student effort and time on task. Students described the basic level as “No effort. I worked way too quickly, and I didn’t reread or revise my work. The paper is not my best and neatest.” The top level is “My best effort. I thought and tried my hardest. I spent enough time to give my brain quality time. I carefully reread and revised my work.” Teachers sent the rubric home, and parents signed off on reading it. Parents agreed to regularly review their children’s work and discuss with them the meaning of pride. During parent-teacher conferences, teachers refer to the rubric.

Lantos says the result has been a huge improvement in student work: “Even 2nd graders get it, like the one who wrote: ‘Now I know what quality work looks like.’” All Bielefield students have produced at least one “pride paper” that meets the top-level criteria on the rubric.

Keys to Success
We have discovered practices that help turn compacts into catalysts for action. The most important thing is to create a setting for parents and teachers to talk about how to help the kids—and to get to know one another. At Macdonough, Romeo asked staff members to facilitate meetings with families to ensure teacher buy-in. The process went from a conversation between a self-selected group of teachers and parents, to discussions among many teachers, to one with the entire parent teacher association.

Parent leaders who emerged went to follow-up compact conferences, which strengthened their capacity to engage other families.

Continuing follow-up by the principal is important. Administrators should affirm practices that teachers are already doing—such as book drives and trips to the library—and explicitly link existing practices to the compact and the school improvement plan. This takes teachers’ actions beyond “random acts of family engagement” and integrates them into a systematic plan for improving achievement (Weiss, Lopez, & Rosenberg, 2010).

Working with grade-level colleagues inspires teachers. We found that developing compacts for each grade level made a big difference. At M. D. Fox, the literacy coaches facilitated grade-level meetings and brainstormed specific activities for teachers in each grade. There is a striking difference between

Tools for Engagement
The following books and websites provide resources for engaging families in students’ learning.

- Family Involvement Network of Educators (www.finenetwork.org).
- San Diego Unified School District’s website on family engagement (www.sandi.net/parentoutreach).
the school-family compacts of participating schools before and after this improvement effort. New compacts are more focused on student learning and linked to school data. They are stimulating new, creative activities in schools. Connecticut’s Department of Education will be launching the program statewide as a best practice for Title I parent involvement, leveraging the language of the law to create a powerful strategy for parent-teacher collaboration.  

1Other important partners were the state Parent Involvement Resource Center and the Capitol Region Education Council.

References

Anne T. Henderson is a senior consultant with the Annenberg Institute for School Reform and coauthor (with Karen Mapp, Don Davies, and Vivian Johnson) of Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships (The New Press, 2007); AnneTHenderson1@yahoo.com. Judy Carson is program manager for family and community engagement in the Connecticut Department of Education; Judy.Carson@ct.gov. Patti Avallone is a retired principal and former Title I director for the New Haven school district; patriciaavallone@sbcglobal.net. Melissa Whipple is district program coordinator and trainer for the Parent Outreach and Engagement department of San Diego Unified Schools; mwhipple@sandi.net.

For most schools, school-family compacts are a missed opportunity.
Ten Steps to Success and Tools to Help

1. Motivate and Get Buy-in from the Staff: At a staff meeting with teachers and members of the school leadership team, explain what compacts are and how they can contribute to student success.
   Tool #1: Let's Renew Our Title I Compact -- A PowerPoint presentation with 19 slides that review the Ten Steps to Success and give the big picture on putting it all together
   Tool #1-A: Handout -- Ten Steps to Success for Developing School-Parent Compacts -- A handy list of the Ten Steps all on one page.

2. Designate a Leader to Build a Team: Pick the best person for your school: principal, assistant principal, literacy and math coaches, teacher leader, home-school coordinator, or other person with leadership skills.
   Tool #2: Tips for the Compact Project Leader -- Five sets of tips, one for each major task: recruiting a team, developing a timeline, coordinating resources, assessing families' interests and strengths, and documenting your work.
   Tool #2A: Parent Surveys -- Two surveys: A Family Welcome Questionnaire to help you learn more about students' families, and a Parent Review to guide a discussion with parents about their child's specific interests and abilities.

3. Align Compact with the School Improvement Plan Goals: Review and analyze school-wide data and the goals of the school improvement plan to determine specific skill areas for each grade level that the compact should focus on for the year.
   Tool #3: Align the Compact with your School Improvement Plan -- Four steps for alignment in a handy chart format:
   - Pick your key goals.
   - Revise the wording of each goal so it's family-friendly.
   - Link the goal to high priority actions in your SIP for each grade level.
   - Identify learning strategies for parents and teachers to help students meet the goals.

4. Get Input from Each Grade Level: At data team meetings, ask teachers to identify three goals for each grade level and draft some ideas for home learning strategies to share with families for their ideas and input.
   Tool #4: Grade-Level Input: Capturing Good Ideas -- Six steps you can take to get input from parents, along with how-to examples from three schools that have revamped their compacts.

5. Reach Out to Families: At workshops, class meetings or orientation events, share the grade level goals with parents/guardians. Follow up with two-way conversations among teachers and families at the different grade levels about how to work together to support the goals, and co-create home learning strategies families can use on a regular basis.
   Tool #5: Outreach to Families -- Tips for success organized under three major steps:
   - Welcome families and make sure they feel invited
   - Honor families and ask for their ideas
   - Connect families to what their children are learning.
6. **Don’t Forget the Students:** After the teachers and parents talk about how they will collaborate, ask students what they can do to be successful and how they want their teachers and parents to support them.

   **Tool #6: Getting Input from Students** — Two ways to learn from your students:
   - A sample fifth grade student survey, to be modified for your grade and school. Students can fill this out at school or at home, to reflect on their strengths and challenges.
   - A guide for a classroom discussion, to review what students need to do this year to do their best work.

7. **Pull it All Together:** Create an attractive, family-friendly compact document that captures everyone’s input, then design a “roll out plan” for introducing the compact to families.

   **Tool #7A: Timeline** — A graph that suggests when to start and finish each step to success across the school year.
   **Tool #7B: Compact Template** — A suggested format for your school’s compact that lays out the different sections to be filled in with your goals and plans for working with families.
   **Tool #7C: Rubric** — A guide to help assess the quality and completeness of your compact.
   **Tool #7D: Sample Compact** — Using the template in Tool #7B, this sample is filled in with useful information and exciting learning opportunities for families.

8. **Align All Resources:** Based on your compact goals, identify the resources needed to make it happen, such as professional development, volunteer assistance, and funding to support school and home learning with speakers, supplies, materials.

   **Tool #8: Align Resources with the Compact** — A checklist of resources to tap for funding, professional development, community partners, school communications, parent education, and Title I evaluation.

9. **Market the Compact**
   Seize the opportunity at every event to keep the goals of the school in the forefront, and discuss the goals and modify strategies with parents at conference time.

   **Tool #9: Market Your Compact** — Five tips for making sure your compact gets out to the school community and has an impact on teacher and parent practice.

10. **Review, Revise and Celebrate Progress Each Year:** At the end of the year, pull your compact team together to review progress, identify your big successes and what could have been better, draw up a plan for next year, honor everyone who helped, and let students show off what they’ve learned and how they took responsibility.

    **Tool #10: Review, Revise and Celebrate** — A series of tips for reviewing your compact process, revising the compact based on the review, and celebrating your accomplishments at the end of the year. It also gives examples of what is featured at one school district’s “Glow and Grow” compact celebration each June.
## Compact Tool #7C: School-Parent Compact Guide to Quality

**A Written Agreement to Work Together for Student Success**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Does Our Compact...</th>
<th>Quality Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The School's Role</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.A. Clearly explain district and school goals to meet student academic achievement standards?</td>
<td>Yes ☐ No ☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Be sure to: | • Link actions to goals in school improvement plan (e.g., improving reading comprehension through text-to-self connections)  
• Use data to set specific goals |
| 1.B. Describe ways that teachers are responsible for supporting students’ learning? | Yes ☐ No ☐ |
| • Describe how teachers will help parents understand what children are learning and doing in class  
• Specify how teachers will support parents to take these actions |
| * Provide information and actions specific to each grade level. | Yes ☐ No ☐ |
| • Work with grade-level data teams and parents to design high-impact actions for each grade level |
| **The Parent's Role** |                     |
| 2. Describe specific ways parents can be responsible for supporting their children’s learning? | Yes ☐ No ☐ |
| Be sure to: | • Connect activities for families to what students are doing in class |
| * Provide information and actions specific to each grade level. | Yes ☐ No ☐ |
| • Work with grade-level data teams and parents to design high-impact actions for each grade level |
| **The Student's Role** |                     |
| 3. Describe specific ways students will be responsible for their learning? | Yes ☐ No ☐ |
| Be sure to: | • Connect activities for families to what students are doing in class |
| * Provide information and actions specific to each grade level. | Yes ☐ No ☐ |
| • Work with grade-level data teams and parents to design high-impact actions for each grade level |
| **Activities to Develop Partnerships** |                     |
| 4. Describe school activities to build partnerships with parents and how these activities relate to student achievement? | Yes ☐ No ☐ |
| Be sure to: | • Provide both parents and teachers opportunities to develop skills for working together  
• Identify key parent needs  
• Offer meetings at different days and times |
| **Jointly Developed Activities** |                     |
| 5. Describe how parents are involved in developing and revising the compact? | Yes ☐ No ☐ |
| Be sure to: | • Provide resources to cover costs for parents to take part, such as child care and transportation |
| **Communicate About Student Progress** |                     |
| 6. Describe several methods for regular teacher-parent communication? | Yes ☐ No ☐ |
| Be sure to: | • Include follow-up steps to support parents and students  
• Consult with parents on communication strategies that work best for them  
• Make it do-able and user-friendly |
| **Format and Language** |                     |
| 7. In a format and language that are accessible to families. | Yes ☐ No ☐ |
| Be sure to: | • Work with parents to identify and eliminate jargon and negative language  
• Engage parents/staff with design skills to create an attractive final product  
• Translate compact and communications into families’ first languages |

* This is a best practice and is not required under the law.
What is a School-Parent Compact?

A School-Parent Compact for Achievement is an agreement that parents, students and teachers develop together. It explains how parents and teachers will work together to make sure all our students reach grade-level standards.

Effective compacts:
- Link to goals of the school improvement plan
- Focus on student learning skills
- Describe how teachers will help students develop those skills using high-quality instruction
- Share strategies parents can use at home
- Explain how teachers and parents will communicate about student progress
- Describe opportunities for parents to volunteer, observe, and participate in the classroom

Jointly Developed

The parents, students and staff of Nutmeg Elementary School developed this School-Parent Compact for Achievement. Teachers suggested home learning strategies, parents added ideas to make them more specific, and students told us what would help them learn. Meetings are held each year to review the Compact and make changes based on student needs.

Parents are welcome to contribute comments at any time.

If you would like to volunteer, participate and/or observe in the classroom, please contact: Patti Muñoz at pmunoz@nutmeg.org or 860-555-1212, Ext 12 or go to our school Web site and click on the Parent Button.

Building Partnerships

3rd Thursdays

Family Fun Learning Adventures!

Join Us for Our “Go for the Gold” Night
Third Thursday of September (5:30 p.m.- 7:00 p.m.)

- Help your child to become a “Goal” Medalist! You and your fourth grader will learn how to set 2-3 student learning goals and ways to achieve them.
- Enjoy GAME TIME with your child exploring free home learning kits designed to support your child’s “Olympic-Sized” learning goal. Gold medals and snacks provided!

Join us for a “Literacy Safari” 3rd Thursday in October.
Safari gear & refreshments provided.

MORE FAMILY FUN LEARNING ADVENTURES
3rd Thursdays in January, March & May.
Detailed information will be sent home.

Communication about Student Learning

Nutmeg Elementary School is committed to frequent two-way communication with families about children’s learning. Some of the ways you can expect us to reach you are:

- Weekly homework folders
- Monthly “check-in” notes or phone calls
- Updates on the school Web site and current grades in PowerSchool
- Class meetings on understanding student progress
- Parent-teacher conferences in November and March

Do you have questions about your child’s progress?
Contact your child’s teacher by phone (860-555-1212) or e-mail. E-mail addresses are on the school Web site at www.nutmegschool.org.

SCHOOL-PARENT COMPACT FOR ACHIEVEMENT
2012 – 2013

Nutmeg Elementary School
Mary Ellen Pleasant, Principal
www.nutmegschool.org  860-555-1212
District Goals
By June 2020, all students will be at grade level or higher in both math and reading.

We will get there by:
1. Increasing each student’s fluency and understanding in reading across all grade levels by 15% over 3 years.
2. Increasing each student’s competency in math computation, word problems and number operations by 15% over 3 years.

School Goals
By 2015, our students will make a 20% gain in math and reading; 75% of students will be at grade level in reading, and 80% at grade level in math.

Our focus in reading will be:
- Beginning sounds and sight words in grades K-1
- Vocabulary development in grades K-4
- Making text connections in grades 5-6

Our focus in math will be:
- Place value and estimation in grades K-6

School Goals
By 2015, our students will make a 20% gain in math and reading; 75% of students will be at grade level in reading, and 80% at grade level in math.

Our focus in reading will be:
- Beginning sounds and sight words in grades K-1
- Vocabulary development in grades K-4
- Making text connections in grades 5-6

Our focus in math will be:
- Place value and estimation in grades K-6

Our Goals for Student Achievement

In Our 4th Grade Classroom
The 4th grade team will work with students and their families to support students’ success in reading and math. Some of our key connections with families will be:
- Develop a weekly goals folder with students and send home materials to help parents support the learning goals.
- Use the “word wall” and storytelling to incorporate new words. Send new words to families each week with information on how to build a home word wall and develop their own stories.
- Design a fun family literacy night and share classroom strategies with families on how to help students connect personal experiences to the story.
- Develop goals with students that focus on increasing their skill in estimation and measurement. Send goals to parents along with some practical ideas for supporting their learning goals at home.

At Home
Nutmeg School parents joined staff to develop ideas about how families can support students’ success in reading and math.
- Use the weekly folder to discuss my child’s learning goals and use the teacher’s materials to support my child’s learning at home.
- Post new words on our “word wall” and remember to use them in conversations and stories. Add our own new words.
- Read with my child every day and talk about how the story connects with things that he or she has experienced. Attend the family fun literacy night to practice new ways to support my child as a reader.
- Use the math goals and related games or strategies the teacher sends home to improve my child’s estimation and measurement skills.

Nutmeg Students
Nutmeg School students joined staff and parents to develop ideas about how they can succeed in school and reach for the stars in math and reading. Students thought of the following ideas to make connections between learning at home and school:
- Set goals for myself to learn new words and read every day.
- Think of new words to put on our family “word wall.” Share ideas with my friends.
- Make up stories to tell my family using new words.
- Help make the grocery list and estimate how much the food will cost.

OPTIONAL:
- My own personal learning goal is: ____________________________________________________________.
- My teacher can help me reach it by: ____________________________________________________________.
- My parent can help me accomplish it by: ____________________________________________________________.

Family Fun Learning Adventures are a great place to learn new words, practice math – and win prizes! (see the back of this brochure for more information)

When teachers, students and families work together, we CAN achieve our goals!

* Numbers correspond to sections in the “Guide to Quality” Tool in the Dust Off Your Old School Parent Compact training kit developed by the Connecticut State Department of Education and available at www.schoolparentcompact.org.
Compact Tool #3: Align the Compact with your School Improvement Plan

Do your parents, students, and teachers understand the goals of your school improvement plan? Your School-Family Compact offers a great opportunity to explain the goals and decide what students, parents and teachers can do together. To reach those goals, everyone needs to be on board!

But there’s one hitch: We’ve found that many school improvement goals are overly general and hard to understand. First, we must put them in family-friendly language and then break them down into specific steps that can be taken to reach them. These steps will form the basis of your School-Family Compact.

This tool lays out a step-by-step process for translating your goals, linking them to priorities in the school action plan, and then identifying specific home learning strategies to carry out the priorities. In the examples that follow on the next pages, there is an improvement goal, a suggested re-wording of the goal, examples of high priority actions from school improvement plans, and specific home learning strategies that match the priorities and that are taken from actual revitalized compacts.

**Step One:** Pick one of your school improvement plan goals. What does it say? How would you explain it to a group of parents?

**Step Two:** Revise the wording so that it’s family-friendly and clearly explains what should happen. You also can use this wording for your newsletter, posters, and other communications about your school’s plan to improve student achievement.

**Step Three:** Look at your school action plan. What high priority actions are listed that match the goal? Select these for your compact.

**Step Four:** Identify some home learning strategies that are linked to the high priority actions. These are what you should discuss with families at each grade level. Revise and make them more specific, based on parents’ questions and ideas.

Discussing what the goals and priorities mean can lead to real insights into how students are doing, and what needs to happen in each grade to improve student learning.
### First Example: Elementary School Reading Goal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step One: Look at the original SIP Goal</th>
<th>Step Two: Revise the wording to make the goal family-friendly</th>
<th>Step Three: Link the goal to high priority actions in your school action plan</th>
<th>Step Four: Identify strategies teachers and families can use to reach the high priority goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student proficiency in reading on the CMT will increase by 10% over two years. Not clear: • Will all students improve by 10%? • Or will 10% more students reach proficiency? • Where are we now?</td>
<td>Over the next two years, 10% more of our students will become proficient in reading on the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT). For example, the fourth graders who are proficient in reading will move up from ___% to ___%.</td>
<td>Example from 1st grade: Our first grade data show a weakness in sight word vocabulary and application of sight words to text passages. Example from 5th grade: Our 5th grade CMT results show that students are having difficulty making connections from non-fiction passages to situations in real life.</td>
<td>Grade 1: • Teachers will focus on vocabulary development -- sight words and phonetic pronunciations. • Monthly word lists will be sent to each family. • The school web page/parent section will include the words of the month. • The literacy coach will hold three parent workshops per year on extending vocabulary development. Grade 5: • Teachers will focus on strengthening students’ ability to make text-to-self connections in non-fiction reading. • At back to school night, each classroom teacher will conduct a short lesson to explain text connecting and how families can continue this learning at home. • Samples of text connecting will be included in the monthly newsletter and on the website. • Two workshops per year will be provided to assist families in strengthening text connecting, with examples from the CMT as a foundation for each lesson.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Note: Just two grade-level examples are given to save space)
PBIS will be implemented throughout our school and each classroom, reducing referrals and suspensions by 15% over a two-year period.

Not clear:
- What is PBIS?
- Does this mean that 15% fewer students will be referred and suspended?
- Or will there be 15% fewer incidents requiring referral and suspension?
- How many students get in trouble now?

All school staff will learn to use a new system to support positive behavior called PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports). Over the next two years, this will reduce the number of referrals and suspensions by 15%.

In the next two years, referrals to the principal’s office will go down from ____ to _____. Suspensions from school will go down from ____ to _____. (Make sure these numbers show a 15% decrease!)

Grade level data teams determined that student behavior was affecting academic achievement across all the grades.

Each classroom will introduce PBIS at their orientation and provide parents with sample strategies to continue with these supports at home.

A PBIS section will be included in each newsletter highlighting good deeds and positive modeling by students and teachers.

The PTO will host a speaker series, which will focus on Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports which can be done at home.
### Example Three: Elementary School Math Goal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step One: Look at the original SIP Goal</th>
<th>Step Two: Revise the wording to make the goal family-friendly</th>
<th>Step Three: Link the goal to high priority actions in your school action plan</th>
<th>Step Four: Identify strategies teachers and families can use to reach the high priority goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Students’ ability in math concepts as measured by teacher observations and CMT will increase by 15% over a three-year period. Not clear:  
• Does ability mean performance?  
• What will teachers observe?  
• How are students doing now?  | **Student's knowledge and skills in math, as measured on the Connecticut Mastery Test as well as by teacher assessments, will improve by 15% over the next three years.**  
For example, all students will improve their math scores on the CMT by 5% a year in the next three years, from ____ average score to ____ average score.  | **Example from 3rd grade:**  
Our latest CMT and district wide data repeatedly show that students need clear and frequent instruction in estimation and measurement in grades K-3.  
**Example from 6th grade:**  
Data from pre-tests, classroom observations, and CMT results show the need for clear instruction and more practice on problem solving skills.  | **Math/grade 3:**  
• Our students will concentrate on mastering skills in estimation and measurement  
• Teachers will send home a packet of materials for students to use (ruler, compass, tape) with fun activities for students and parents to do at home.  
• The math coach will host a “Measuring for Success” evening twice per year to make parents aware of the skills the students are expected to know by the end of grade 3.  |
| Math/grade 6:  
• Teachers will send home samples of problem-solving techniques monthly, with tips to identify key words and phrases that help students choose the correct operation for solving a variety of math problems.  
• Samples of word problems a will be included in each classroom newsletter.  
• A family math game night entitled, “Solving Math Mysteries: What’s the Problem?” will be held in the fall and spring to demonstrate to parents similar teaching strategies used in class, along with fun ways to solve everyday math problems at home. |

(Note: Two grade-level examples are given to save space)
Example Four: High School Reading Goal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step One: Look at the original SIP Goal</th>
<th>Step Two: Revise the wording to make the goal family-friendly</th>
<th>Step Three: Link the goal to high priority actions in your school action plan</th>
<th>Step Four: Identify strategies teachers and families can use to reach the high priority goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **On the CAPT in reading, the grade level gain at or above proficiency will increase by 15% points over a three-year period.**  
Not clear:  
• What is grade level gain?  
• Will all students’ scores improve 15% or will the percent of students who are proficient increase by 15%?  
• What percent of our students are at grade level now? | **On the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT), the number of students who will be proficient in reading for their grade level will increase by 15% over the next three years.**  
For example, the percent of 9th graders who are reading at a 11th grade level at the end of the 11th grade will increase from ___% to ____%. | Weakness in understanding longer passages of non-fiction writing is reflected in our 2010 CAPT scores. | Teachers will provide examples of non-fiction reading essays/stories and provide parents with standard questions that go along with the samples.  
At orientation and report card night, parents will be encouraged to visit the library and the conference room where samples of required non-fiction books will displayed for parent review and check out.  
Content area teachers will send home samples of CAPT questions with strategies that can be applied to each type of question. All of these will be in the genre of non-fiction. |