

# District Parent/Partnership Advisory Committee

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Middletown Public Schools  
Middletown, Connecticut

Monthly mega-meetings helped officials from Middletown Public Schools bring together members of a complex community network to move toward a common goal last year. Through the District Parent Partnership Advisory Committee, parents, teachers, administrators, students, and other organizational leaders worked on topics of interest to them, while keeping in sight the overall goal of increasing students' academic achievement.

District officials created the committee to help a number of separate education interest groups communicate effectively. Before the committee, the district had a Parent Involvement Committee, a District Parent Teacher Association, District School Family Community Partners, and more—all meeting and working separately. There was much overlap and inefficiency among the groups, and different meeting times and locations often limited communication. To end the confusion, district officials developed a meeting plan open to any group or individual connected to Middletown Public Schools.

The leaders formed a small staff committee to outline meeting structure and rules. They wanted to host monthly two-hour meetings where groups could come together and discuss topics that they suggest. They recruited a planning committee with representatives from all 11 schools in the district. The planning committee set the meeting agenda—usually a triad of roundtable discussions on different topics. They also recruited presenters to lead these discussions.

Once the agenda was set, the district's parent coordinator began publicizing the meeting times in fliers, e-mails, school and district web sites, and mailings. High school students, school board members, NAACP representatives, local faith-based organizations, and others were notified about the meetings.

Between September and June, about

170 people met to discuss ways to increase students' academic achievement in Middletown schools.

Staff provided dinner and childcare for busy parents. Attendees rotated among discussion groups every 30 minutes, covering topics such as summer reading lists, state accountability reports, and school budgets. Parents gave plenty of feedback on school improvement plans and other programs.

"I valued the sense of working together cooperatively as a community," one person said.

Animated discussion filled most meetings. Over the months, end-of-session feedback saw participants changing meeting times and increasing the length of each roundtable discussion. Some of the committee's most active participants were motivated to join other decision-making groups. Others took the information to share with their constituents.

"After this session, I plan to discuss the need for media specialists in the elementary schools with other parents," reflected one parent.

Childcare and food cost about \$1,600 for the school year. In addition, the parent resource coordinator spent several hours per week planning the event. The district used Title I and district funds to cover the expenses.

The district hopes to create a web site and blog to post summaries of the meetings and other information, and will continue the collaborative meetings next year. Each meeting will be held in a different school or community location.

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