

# Wisconsin's REACH Initiative

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction  
Madison, Wisconsin

How can partnerships help schools remove barriers to learning and promote the success of all students in the state? Wisconsin's REACH (Responsive Education for All Children) Initiative provides schools with leadership and technical assistance to increase instructional options, professional development and family-school-community partnerships.

The REACH Family Involvement Team (FIT), a collaborative group of five state agencies and organizations, offers assistance and resources to district and building leadership teams so they can better meet students' needs by strengthening partnerships. FIT, which functions as a state-level Action Team for Partnerships, urges schools to use the Six Types of Family-School-Community Partnerships to achieve their school improvement goals. It also advises schools to form action teams and explore how partnerships can help the school meet academic and behavioral goals.

Despite its diverse representation, FIT works because it focuses on families' strengths in helping children learn and grow. The group meets every other month to develop technical assistance materials, design workshops and review networking opportunities offered at four REACH Regional Collaborative Centers.

FIT kicked off its REACH efforts in December 2006 with a two-day "training of trainers" for 35 parents, mentors and educators statewide. They learned how to help schools infuse effective partnership plans and practices into their goals for students. Research-based partnership materials from NNPS formed the backbone of all five partnership-promoting workshops.

REACH emphasizes the importance of well-organized programs of family and community involvement. Although competitive grants are available to schools and districts implementing REACH, the goal is for all schools in Wisconsin to adopt a collaborative approach to

prevent students' learning and behavior problems, especially among students who are at risk of failing or of being referred to special education programs.

REACH is a major initiative of the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction; it promotes State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster's "New Wisconsin Promise," – a commitment to close the achievement gap. The New Wisconsin Promise also encourages greater parent and community involvement in public schools and libraries. The initiative is receives federal grant money. In 2006-07, 271 Wisconsin schools in 93 districts received \$1.4 million in REACH funds.

One parent in a REACH school commented: "It's an overwhelmingly wonderful feeling to have a room full of loving, caring people ... drawing on varied backgrounds ... getting to know your child and working together to assure that this young mind is receiving the best education he or she can."

FIT also makes written and online family-school-community partnership materials available to teachers, who meet frequently with each other and with school support staff to share ideas on helping children learn. This group developed "The Team Approach to Meeting Student Needs: A Guide for Families in English and Spanish." The group is working on another publication, "Involving Families in Meeting Student Needs: A Guide for School Staff," to be published in 2007 and distributed to all Wisconsin schools.

FIT's ongoing support for partnerships ensures that families will continue to play a central role in helping children learn and flourish.

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