

# Archived Information

## GET STARTED



### **The Core Compact Team**

The first steps in developing a Compact for Reading are to form a Core Compact Team if you do not already have one, and identify people who can serve on a Compact Invention Team—the Team that will actually develop the Compact for Reading.

The Core Compact Team oversees the development, implementation, and evaluation for your school-family-community partnership. The Core Team includes as members at least one principal, teacher, parent, and another community member.

#### **The basic responsibilities of Core Team members are as follows:**

- Define and present the purpose of the Compact for Reading;
- Recruit members for the Compact Invention Team (if the Core Team is not going to write the Compact);
- Identify the school’s literacy needs and resources;
- Analyze the current reading standardized test scores;

- Organize and facilitate Invention Team meetings;
- Present and explain the Compact to the wider group of teachers, parents, and community members, once the Compact is completed;
- Monitor your school’s progress toward achieving the Compact’s goals; and
- Update and strengthen your Compact in accordance with your review of progress.

Team members should be knowledgeable about reading and family involvement, know the school and its broader community, and be willing to take a leadership role in overseeing the school Compact process.

In forming your Core Compact Team, you may want to use an existing team to take on these responsibilities. For example, look at the membership of an existing Compact Team, a school-based management council, a family-school advisory group, a working team of the Parent-Teacher Association or Organization, or business-school partnership, or a similar group that works closely with the school, families, and communities on educational matters.

## **The Compact Invention Team**

One of the responsibilities of the Core Compact Team is to identify people in the school and community who will brainstorm, strategize, and develop the Compact.

In some cases, the Core Compact Team may want to take on these responsibilities. In other cases, the Core Team will need to form another team—the Compact Invention Team—to develop the Compact.

Among representatives reflecting the make up of your school community, who could be considered for your Compact Inventory Team, include:

- Teachers from each grade level,
- Parents from each grade level,
- Parents of students with limited English proficiency (LEP),

- Parents of students with disabilities,
- School administrators,
- Reading specialists or literacy coordinators,
- Representatives of the school's business community or university partners, and
- Members of local community organizations, librarians, literacy groups, cultural or arts associations, or senior citizens groups dedicated to improving education.

The members of the Compact Invention Team are responsible for developing and writing the Compact; for working to ensure that the school staff, parents, and other community members understand the Compact; and for obtaining continuing commitment from the school community to fulfill it, once it is adopted.



## Assisting Participants

Parents, teachers, and community members who may be interested in participating in the development and writing process may not be able to attend meetings because they cannot afford child care, do not have transportation, or have time constraints that make it impossible to attend.

There are several ways your team can take into account the time pressures and responsibilities facing parents, teachers, and community members when scheduling a meeting.

### Teams can assist families by:

- Asking interested individuals to respond with a list of times most convenient for them to meet;
- Providing early notices of meetings and activities, allowing time for people to adjust their schedules;
- Offering transportation and child care services; and
- Holding meetings near families' homes (e.g., at community or public housing centers);

### Teams can assist teachers by:

- Providing stipends for teachers' transportation and child care services, and
- Providing substitute teachers if the meetings are held during the school day.

This attention sends a strong message to teachers and parents that the core team is serious about involving others in the writing process.

## Team-Building Checklist

Directions: Use this checklist to make sure you have completed all necessary activities to form a strong Compact Team.

- ✓ Does your core team include:
  - The school principal?
  - At least one teacher?
  - At least one parent?
  - At least one community member?
- ✓ Has the core team written a letter inviting administrators, teachers, parents, and community members to participate in writing the Compact?
  - Yes  No
- ✓ Does the invitation include:
  - The purpose of the Compact for Reading?
  - The time and place of the first meeting *or* a response card asking individuals the best time for them to meet?
- ✓ Has the invitation been translated into the languages parents and community members speak at home?
  - Yes  No
- ✓ Does your Invention Team include:
  - Teachers from each grade level?
  - Parents representing each grade level?
  - Parents of LEP students?
  - Parents of students with disabilities?
  - School administrators?
  - Your school's reading specialists or literacy coordinators?
  - Representatives from your school's business community or university partners?
  - Members of local community organizations dedicated to improving education?
- ✓ Have arrangements been made to accommodate the time, transportation, and/or child care needs of the Invention Team members?
  - Yes  No
- ✓ Have arrangements been made to provide a translator for non-English-speaking team members at the meetings?
  - Yes  No

## **Addressing Language Differences**

To create a Compact Invention Team that truly represents your school community, it is crucial that the invitations and meeting notices be translated into the languages spoken by your parent and community populations. If members of these communities do not respond to the notices, your Core Team should try to personally recruit individuals to be on the team. The team needs to represent all segments of the community.

Moreover, it is vital to provide a translator for these individuals during the Compact Invention Team meetings. Ask other parents, teachers, and community members whether they will serve as translators for these parents and community members. If this is not possible, check to see if a translator can be hired from a private agency.

## **Taking an Inventory of Your School's Literacy Needs and Resources**

Two important responsibilities of the Core Team are to evaluate student achievement in reading, writing, listening, and speaking, and to take an inventory of the school's resources that support reading. Thus, the Core Team:

- Looks at student test scores over a period of several years for the whole school, as well as for subgroups (for example, students in various grades, racial/ethnic groups, and special populations like Title I, special education, and bilingual education), and speak with a sample of teach-

ers, reading specialists, and parents about whether students are meeting or exceeding expectations.

- Looks at the adequacy of funding allocated to literacy resources over a period of several years. Literacy resources include books and instructional materials, professional development that provides a forum for presenting new research on teaching and assessing reading, as well as workshops for parents on how they can help their children become independent readers and writers.
- Looks at the availability of special programs or services at the school, such as the use of after-school volunteer tutors from local high schools or universities, books donated from business or community groups, and discounted photocopying services.

The information gathered in this literacy inventory will help your Core Team write your Compact.

Before the first formal Compact Invention Team meeting, Core Team members can use *Activity Sheet 1A* to take stock of the school's literacy efforts, as shared by principals, teachers, and families.

# 1 GET STARTED

## Activity Sheet A: Taking Stock of Your School's Reading Standards and Activities

Before your first Compact Invention Team meeting, the Core Team can use the following activity sheet to begin to assess your school's reading program, literacy resources, and family-school partnerships.

	Ask the Principal	Ask Teachers	Ask Families
<b>Shared Responsibility for Learning</b>	<p>What are the reading standards in place at your school?</p> <p>Are special subgroups of children (ethnic/racial groups; special populations like Title I, special education, and bilingual education students) performing at expected levels?</p> <p>How do your reading scores compare to those at similar schools in your district or state?</p> <p>What trends do you see in your reading scores over the last 5 years?</p>	<p>How do teachers address the reading standards in their classrooms?</p> <p>What kinds of reading programs and special assistance exist, such as tutoring or after-school programs, to help students meet higher reading standards?</p>	<p>What have your child's teachers explained about the role that reading standards play in determining classroom work and their expectations for your child's performance?</p> <p>Have the teachers given you examples of outstanding student work?</p> <p>Are there activities you can use at home with your child to support classroom work?</p> <p>Do you regularly attend parent-teacher conferences?</p>
<b>Shared Responsibility for Communicating</b>	<p>Are there clear school policies about the availability of the principal and teachers to meet with families?</p>	<p>Do you talk with families on a regular basis about who can help their children with school assignments?</p> <p>Are you asking families to attend parent-teacher conferences so that you can show them new ways they can help?</p>	<p>Is there an open line of communication between your family and your child's teachers and the principal, and vice versa?</p> <p>Are you responsive to your child's teachers' concerns and suggestions?</p>
<b>Shared Responsibility for Building Capacity</b>	<p>What resources are available to provide extra literacy support for students?</p>	<p>Do you have the necessary training (past and ongoing) to teach reading and work with families?</p>	<p>What kind of training/support do you need and have to help you work with your children?</p>



**Notes**

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# WRITE YOUR COMPACT

# 2

The goal of the second step of the Compact process is to write your school's Compact for Reading so that it addresses the shared responsibilities of students, families, school administrators and teachers, and learning partners in the community in meeting the needs of the student in reading.

## The First Meeting of the Compact Invention Team

The Core Compact Team facilitates the first meeting with the Compact Invention Team members. The facilitator, who is designated by the Core Team, leads the meeting. During the meeting the facilitator:

- **Invites members** of the Core Team and the Compact Team to introduce themselves.
- **Hands out a general outline or agenda** of the meeting. This can be distributed prior to or at the beginning of the first meeting.
- **Provides a team roster** of the Compact Invention Team. All team members are encouraged to speak with each other about the Compact during the writing process.
- **States the overall purpose** of the Compact process and discusses the process by which the Invention Team will write the Compact for Reading.
- **Establishes the ground rules** for this and all other meetings, such as, "respect each other's ideas" and "only one team member may speak at a time," as a way to show that everyone's participation is welcome and desired. These ground rules will be reviewed at each meeting.

## MEETING CHECKLIST

**Directions:** Use this checklist to make sure you have completed all necessary steps in organizing the initial meeting. Has the Core Team:

- ✓ **Conducted and distributed an inventory of the literacy needs and resources of the school?**  
 Yes  No
- ✓ **Prepared a meeting outline or agenda?**  
 Yes  No
- ✓ **Prepared a team roster?**  
 Yes  No
- ✓ **Established the ground rules for the meeting?**  
 Yes  No
- ✓ **Determined the process by which the team will write the Compact for Literacy?**  
 Yes  No
- ✓ **Provided a translator for non-English speaking team members?**  
 Yes  No
- ✓ **Provided easel boards, paper, tape, and markers for each break-out group?**  
 Yes  No

## **Getting Down to Work**

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### ***Explaining the Results of the Literacy Inventory***

The first item on the work agenda is for the facilitator to report and explain the findings of the inventory of literacy resources and current levels of student achievement. The facilitator provides a handout that describes in detail the Core Team responses to the Literacy Inventory and that summarizes student achievement data.

### ***Identifying Partner Commitments***

Once the results of the literacy inventory are understood, the facilitator asks the larger group to form small break-out groups, with parents in one group, teachers in another, principals and administrators in another, and community members in a fourth group.

Using *Activity Sheets 2A* through *2D*, the facilitator hands out each sheet to the appropriate group (*2A* to parents, *2B* to teachers, and so forth). Members of each group are told that they are going to brainstorm ideas on how they, as a special constituency in the school, can make a commitment to achieve the goal of the Compact—so that the school, its families, and community members can all work together to improve students' reading achievement.

Remind each group that in brainstorming, no idea is a “dumb” idea. All ideas should be written down for later consideration, without judgment from the group. Provide easels, large sheets of paper, marker pens, and tape for each group, so that pages of ideas can be hung up at the front of the room.

Ask each group to identify one person to present the small group's ideas to the larger group. Have each group look over its individually tailored Activity Sheet.

Then ask each group to write its partnering name (“Teachers,” “Parents,” “Administrators,” “Community Members”) at the top of a piece of easel paper, and look through the list of commitments on the page. These are commitments that can help to form a strong Compact for Reading.

Arrange the commitments in order of priority, keeping in mind the school's resources that were identified by the literacy inventory. Team members may add new items to the list as desired.

Reconvene the break-out groups and ask each group to present its list of top priorities for commitments that should be added to the school's Compact for Reading. Make sure to reserve enough time to evaluate and edit each group's findings in line with the school's needs and resources.

### ***Writing the First Draft of the Compact***

Reconvened as one team, the Compact Invention Team should now choose 5 to 10 key commitments for each partner to be included in the school's Compact for Reading. These may be chosen by:

- Reaching a consensus through discussion (those who disagree usually “agree to disagree” if the majority of members take an opposing view).

# 2 WRITE THE COMPACT

## Activity Sheet A: How Parents Can Improve Children's Reading Achievement

Look at the following sample list of commitments that parents can make to form a strong Compact for Reading. Rank in order of importance each of the following commitments that you want to add to your Compact for Reading. You may add new commitments to this sample list as desired.

Student Learning	Communication	Capacity Building
<input type="checkbox"/> Do activities at home that continue my child's classroom learning at home.	<input type="checkbox"/> Know what is expected of my child, by grade, in reading and other language arts skills.	<input type="checkbox"/> Ask for workshops on how children learn to read and write and how parents can help.
<input type="checkbox"/> Monitor my child's progress and sign completed homework.	<input type="checkbox"/> Know what my child is learning about reading and other language arts skills each day, and what the teacher is teaching.	<input type="checkbox"/> Attend workshops on how parents can help children learn to read and write.
<input type="checkbox"/> Discuss with my child the importance of being a strong, independent reader and writer.	<input type="checkbox"/> Actively participate in back-to-school events and parent-teacher conferences.	<input type="checkbox"/> Contact my child's teacher or reading specialist when my child does not understand an assignment or needs special help.
<input type="checkbox"/> Read at home with my child at least 30 minutes a day.	<input type="checkbox"/> Set up special meetings with my child's teachers when I cannot attend back-to-school events or parent-teacher conferences.	<input type="checkbox"/> Ask local businesses or community groups to provide the resources (books, tutors, etc.) that my child's school needs to meet its reading standards.
<input type="checkbox"/> Ask for home learning activities in my primary language.	<input type="checkbox"/> Contact the teachers when I am concerned about my child's progress or have a question about the school's literacy standards.	<input type="checkbox"/> Work with the school to ensure that workshops have translators or equipment for translations for non-English-speaking parents.



# 2 WRITE THE COMPACT

## Activity Sheet B: How Teachers Can Improve Children's Reading Achievement

Look at the following sample list of commitments that teachers can make to form a strong Compact for Reading. Rank in order of importance each of the following commitments that you want to add to your Compact for Reading. You may add new commitments to this sample list as desired.

Student Learning	Communication	Capacity Building
<input type="checkbox"/> Expect students to learn basic <i>and</i> advanced literacy skills and do challenging work.	<input type="checkbox"/> Provide ongoing communication with families about the literacy skills their children are learning.	<input type="checkbox"/> Guide parents to help their children with home learning activities.
<input type="checkbox"/> Teach to challenging school standards.	<input type="checkbox"/> Inform students, families, and the community about the school's high literacy standards, and ways they can help children reach these standards.	<input type="checkbox"/> Ask for and attend workshops to learn about research-based methods for teaching literacy skills.
<input type="checkbox"/> Provide meaningful learning activities, with clear directions for parents to use at home, that reinforce school standards and classroom learning.	<input type="checkbox"/> Encourage parents to read with their children at least 30 minutes per day and to get a library card for their child.	<input type="checkbox"/> Ask for and attend workshops to learn how to work effectively in partnership with families.
<input type="checkbox"/> Offer special assistance and provide more time to accommodate students' individual learning needs.	<input type="checkbox"/> Give families timely reports of their children's progress in reading and the school's overall performance.	<input type="checkbox"/> Meet frequently with other teachers to discuss effective teaching strategies in reading, writing, listening, and speaking; students' needs; and school resources.
<input type="checkbox"/> Meet with the student and the family to discuss the student's progress.	<input type="checkbox"/> Develop a system of continuing communication with families such as regular phone calls or notes on progress.	<input type="checkbox"/> Hold frequent parent training workshops to improve the help parents can give their children at home in reading.
<input type="checkbox"/> Link teacher instruction with after school and summer reading programs.	<input type="checkbox"/> Communicate with tutors about individual students' needs for extended learning.	<input type="checkbox"/> Hold workshops for tutors on effective methods for helping students with literacy activities.

# 2 WRITE THE COMPACT

## Activity Sheet C: How Administrators Can Improve Children’s Reading Achievement

Look at the following sample list of commitments that administrators can make to form a strong Compact for Reading. Rank in order of importance each of the following commitments that you want to add to your Compact for Reading. You may add new commitments to this sample list as desired.

Student Learning	Communication	Capacity Building
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Set high standards in reading and other language arts.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Report publicly on the schoolwide reading scores. Help teachers and parents understand how adopting high standards can lead to the improvement of scores.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Allocate adequate resources to ensure that high standards can be met.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Hold workshops on the standards in reading—what they are, what they mean by grade, and how to set the standards into practice at school and at home.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Provide activities in reading that can be done at home or after school to support schoolwork in reading.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Communicate with teachers and parents about the role of extended-learning activities in improving children’s and school achievement records.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Work with teachers to use these activities with families, and encourage families to use these activities at home.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Provide special benefits to teachers that meet with families and tutors in extended-learning programs for children.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Communicate the school’s commitment to extending learning time for students needing special help in reading.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Train tutors and families to work with children on home activities, like the School-Home Links.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Start or expand after school, weekend, and summer reading programs for students who need or who want to expand their skills.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Build community partnerships with libraries, literacy and cultural groups, colleges and universities, senior citizens, and state and local government to help provide quality after school, weekend and summer efforts.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Seek out provide staff development opportunities to link reading teachers with after school staff and tutors.</li> </ul>



# 2 WRITE THE COMPACT

## Activity Sheet D: How Community Members Can Improve Children’s Reading Achievement

Look at the following sample list of commitments that community members can make to form a strong Compact for Reading. Rank in order of importance each of the following commitments that you want to add to your Compact for Reading. You may add new commitments to this sample list as desired.

Student Learning	Communication	Capacity Building
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Keep informed about the literacy standards and the performance of your local school.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Call the school and attend open houses to find out more about the school’s reading standards.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Businesses and other community organizations may donate age-appropriate books, photocopying services, or other resources the school needs in its efforts to meet high standards.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Volunteer to tutor students who need help with reading. Read with each student at least 30 minutes once a week.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Build a community network of concerned adults—community leaders, journalists, writers, librarians, cultural professionals, college and university staff, and others—to discuss and publicize local literacy issues.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Organize workshops for tutors on effective tutoring methods.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Open other facilities where students can go after school to read with someone or to do their homework.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Participate in ongoing communication with the school staff about how volunteer tutors can meet students’ learning needs.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Discuss often with school staff how volunteer tutors can meet students’ learning needs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Colleges and universities may offer workshops for teachers on new, research-validated methods for teaching literacy skills.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Create a community “culture” and broad-based support to highlight the need to improve students reading skills and abilities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Encourage community leaders to serve as spokespeople for areas where they can make a difference in helping schools and families improve reading outcomes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Train whole organizations in ways to improve student learning in reading, such as high-quality tutoring or employee parent training.</li> </ul>

- Taking a vote. If you call a vote, each team member uses a marker to check his or her top three commitments from each group's list. The 5 to 10 items with the most checks are incorporated into the first draft of the Compact.

Time is an important consideration during your team meetings. Creating the first draft of the Compact may take more than two hours. If you run out of time, schedule the next meeting time and place before the participants leave to ensure that most of the team members will be available to continue writing the Compact.

### ***Writing the Final Draft***

#### **I. Wide Review and Feedback**

It is vital that members of the school community who did not serve on the Invention Team have an opportunity to voice their opinions about the content of the draft Compact that has been developed and make suggestions. Once the draft is completed, the Core Team should distribute it to the Invention Team members, all school staff, parents, and other interested community members for written feedback by a set date.

The team member distributing the draft for wide review should remind readers of the needs the team is addressing, the resources available to meet those needs, and the process used to create the first draft. As with other school communications, the letter should be translated into relevant foreign

languages. Special outreach meetings should be held to reach busy people who might not respond to written requests for feedback.

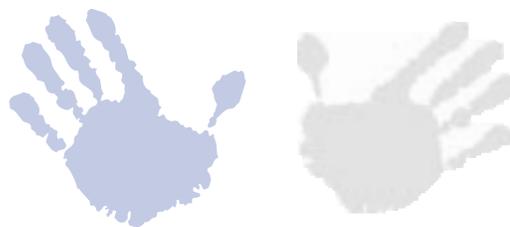
#### **2. Revision**

Core Team members compile the feedback and incorporate the relevant comments into a revised draft. As result of this process, there may be more than the recommended 5 to 10 commitments in each category.

#### **3. The Final Compact for Reading**

The Compact Invention Team then reconvenes. The Core Team shares the feedback they and the Invention Team have received. The Invention Team discusses the revisions (this may be done in break-out groups), goes through the voting process again to identify no more than 10 commitments in each category, and approves the school's Compact for Reading. Completing the Compact may take more than one meeting.

Finally, the Core Team develops a letter of introduction and explanation to the Compact for Reading . This letter can summarize the current status of literacy in the school community, including areas of success and areas needing improvement, the roster of Core and Invention Team members, the process used to develop the Compact, and a statement of support by the team members for the widespread implementation of the Compact.



## **Making the Compact a Part of the School Community**

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Now that the Compact for Reading has been written and printed in final form with a letter of introduction and explanation, the next step in making the Compact a part of school life is to talk to the entire school community about the Compact. There are several ways the Core and Invention Teams can accomplish this:

- Teachers can learn about the Compact at regular staff meetings, grade-level meetings, or individual meetings with members of the Invention Team, and discuss how they can implement the Compact in their daily work.
- Parents can be told about the importance of their role in the Compact at special parent meetings, during open houses, or by their child's classroom teacher during parent conferences. Translators should be provided for those parents who do not speak English, so that all clearly understand their responsibilities. Parent leaders in the school should make special efforts to spread the word about the Compact in their communities.
- To open discussions on how they can be helpful in implementing the Compact, community members may be informed about the Compact at town hall meetings, special community open houses at the school, in local churches and faith communities, in library and literacy groups, and in cultural and neighborhood associations, or at the monthly meetings of your local chamber of commerce or business association.
- Students can be introduced to their responsibilities and commitments in the Compact, as well as those of their teachers, principals, and other community members, through special discussions in school and at home.



# PUT YOUR COMPACT FOR READING TO WORK

# 3

The goal of the third step of the Compact process is to ensure that the Compact, once written and accepted by the community, is actually used to improve the reading and other language arts skills and achievement of children.

The Core and Invention Teams should meet periodically with the partners signing the Compact, to review the commitments in the Compact. Status reports can be provided on the extent to which principals, teachers, families, and their children are meeting their commitments in the Compact for Reading. The teams, for example, may want to make a checklist of all the commitments made on the Compact and rewrite each commitment as a question— “Have you... (conducted workshops, sent home learning activities each night, obtained a library card for each child)?”—to use at these meetings (*see Activity Sheet 3A*).

**These meetings can be excellent opportunities for identifying and documenting:**

- What is going well,
- Which commitments have been hard to meet and need further attention,
- Which new needs partners want addressed, and

- Which resources are needed to fully implement the Compact.

As report cards go out to the students each grading period, the Core Team provides summary reports on important progress made by partners to fulfill the Compact responsibilities, resources that are needed to implement the Compact, and any new Compact activities that are scheduled to be kicked off during the next term.

## **The School-Home Links Reading Kit: A Launching Activity for Your New Compact**

Launching your new Compact for Reading with an activity that involves all the partners who signed your school Compact highlights the importance of the Compact as a tool to drive improvement.



# 3 Put Your Compact for Reading to Work

## Activity Sheet A: Putting Your School's Compact Into Action (Continued)

### Teachers

- ✓ Do you regularly teach to the standards in reading?  
 Yes       No
- ✓ Do you send home three to five times a week learning activities, such as School-Home Links activity sheets, that parents can use to reinforce classroom learning?  
 Yes       No
- ✓ Do you check to see whether students complete the activities and follow up when students fail to turn them in?  
 Yes       No
- ✓ Do you use student performance on home activities to help guide classroom reading instruction?  
 Yes       No
- ✓ Do you encourage parents to read 30 minutes a day with their children and get their children a library card?  
 Yes       No
- ✓ Do you send home monthly calendars informing parents of the reading skills that their children will be learning on a weekly or daily basis?  
 Yes       No
- ✓ Have you helped to set up extended-learning programs in your school for children who most need help in reading?  
 Yes       No
- ✓ Have you led or participated in training sessions for families as well as volunteer tutors in the community?  
 Yes       No
- ✓ Do you expect children to perform at basic, then increasingly advanced, levels of reading in your classroom?  
 Yes       No
- ✓ Do you link classroom instructions with after school and summer reading programs?  
 Yes       No
- ✓ Do you communicate regularly with parents of your students, by telephone or notes?  
 Yes       No

To improve family involvement in education, the Mason School in Boston, Massachusetts, launched a School-Home Activities Program. This program offered learning activities for families and their children at home to reinforce the teachers' work in school. The principal and teachers at Mason School developed the take-home materials. Families were asked to work with their children on these simple reading skill builders four times a week. When families were unable to work with children at home because of language or reading barriers, volunteers from the community helped. When all the members of the learning community—students and their families, principals and teachers, and community volunteers—became involved, a critical mass of support was developed for the school, and all partners learned there were clear and simple ways they could help improve the achievement of students.

Working with teams of teachers from the Mason School in Boston, Massachusetts, and Books and Beyond in Solana Beach, California, as well as researchers from the University of Oregon and multiple consultants from the reading and education communities, the Department's Family Involvement Partnership for Learning has developed a kit of materials called the *School-Home Links Reading Kit*. This kit is available as a companion volume to this *Compact Guide*, and can be used to launch your family-school-community Compact for Reading effort.

Two teams of teachers developed one-page reading activities for children in kindergarten through third grade, with approximately 100 activities for each grade level. These easy-to-use activities align with the major "Reading Accomplishments" for children in kindergarten through third grade published by the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) in its report, *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (see Appendix A). The NAS report represents a consensus of national reading experts on some of the important accomplishments students can achieve within a particular grade in reading. Researchers from the University of Oregon further examined state and district standards for reading, as well as research summaries of reading skills and activities by grade, to enhance the NAS "Reading Accomplishments" and ensure that the School-Home Links activities are comprehensive.



## Sample Reading and Literacy Focus Areas from the National Academy of Sciences Report

### Kindergarten

- Knows the parts of a book and their functions.
- Recognizes and can name all uppercase and lowercase letters.
- Correctly answers questions about stories read aloud.

### First Grade

- Reads aloud with accuracy and comprehension any text that is appropriately designed for the first half of grade 1.
- Uses letter-sound correspondence knowledge to sound out unknown words when reading text.
- Has a reading vocabulary of 300 to 500 words (sight words and easily decoded words).

### Second Grade

- Interprets information from diagrams, charts, and graphs.
- Rereads sentences when meaning is not clear.
- Suggests possible answers to how, why, and what-if questions.

### Third Grade

- Reads aloud with fluency and comprehension any text that is appropriately designed for grade three.
- Asks how, why, and what-if questions when interpreting nonfiction texts.



# How the School-Home Links Reading Kit Is Used

## The Principal's Role

### 1. Hold a Meeting For Reading Coordinators and Teachers

The first step in using the *School-Home Links Reading Kit* is for the principal to hold a meeting with the school's reading coordinator and teachers who work with children in kindergarten through third grade.

The principal should discuss the school's reading scores and talk with staff about how the *School-Home Links Reading Kit* can be used to implement the Compact for Reading and to help to raise the reading skills and achievement of children.

Before convening this meeting, the principal should have a thorough knowledge of how to implement the School-Home Links Reading Program and what roles the teachers, children's families, and volunteers from the community can play.

### 2. Convene a Meeting of Families and Community Volunteers

With the reading coordinator and teachers of children in kindergarten through third grade in attendance, the principal convenes a meeting with the families of their students to inform them about the Compact for Reading and their partnering role. At this meeting, all parents or families can be asked to sign the Compact

for Reading as their commitment to work with their own child or children at home to support school work.

The principal introduces the School-Home Links Reading Program as a first step toward implementing the Compact by increasing family involvement in education.

The principal or the reading coordinator discusses the research about the necessary and important role that family involvement in reading plays in students' reading skills and achievement. Plain talk should be used when describing results of studies on parent involvement in reading, so that everyone understands what the research says. (See Appendix B for Reading Fact Sheets that summarize key facts on reading achievement and success).

The principal or the reading coordinator describes how the School-Home Links Reading Program works, and what roles the principal, teachers, families, and community volunteers can play in implementing the program.

The principal states that in the next week, the first School-Home Links Calendar (see Appendix C) and School-Home Links will be sent home.



# The Teacher's Role

## 1. Review the School-Home Links Reading Kit

In a meeting with the principal, teachers should review the *School-Home Links Reading Kit*; suggest how best to introduce the kit to children, families, and other community members who may use the kit for tutoring; and tailor the kit to meet classroom needs. Many teachers will want to supplement or replace some of the activities with their own activities, and they should be encouraged to do so.

## 2. Participate in School Meetings to Prepare Families to Use the School-Home Links

- Go over a few School-Home Links and Book Links with families, permitting them to practice with a partner who plays the child. Show the difference between a School-Home Links and a Book Links activity.
- Discuss the importance of daily reading with their children. Explain that one of the books a child reads during the week will be reported on the one-day-a-week Book Links activity.
- Discuss book-lending opportunities in the school and at the local library. Talk about checking out and returning books as the child's responsibility. Encourage all parents to get a library card for their child.

## 3. Prepare and Send Home a School-Home Links Calendar

Once a month, teachers will prepare and send home a School-Home Links Calendar (Appendix C). This calendar will inform parents of school and classroom literacy

events. It will show the days on which home reading activities (School-Home Links and Book Links) are due. It could show the dates of parent workshops, the days that the school or classroom library is open for children to select books to take home, the visit of a children's author to the school, or the days children visit the public library to take books out. At the bottom of each calendar is the teacher's contact information and a list of times the teacher is available to speak with families. This availability reinforces the essential, open line of communication that your school's Compact for Reading encourages.

## 4. Send Home the School-Home Links Three or Four Times a Week

In the first week following the school training meeting with the families, send home the first School-Home Link, with two letters attached to the activity sheet.

The first letter (see the sample on the following page) is from the student asking the parents or family to help him or her with the assignment using the method discussed at the family workshop.

The second letter is from the teacher (see the sample on page 21) to the family discussing possible sources of books for weekly reading. Some schools have or may want to set up a lending library of books. Rules for borrowing from this lending library and returning books to it should be included in this letter. Typically, children may borrow one or more books for a week, and must return the book or books when the Book Link is handed in.

# 3 Sample Letter from Child to Parents

## Dear Parent:

Today, I am bringing home my first *School-Home Links Reading Kit* activity. Several times a week, I will be working on these activities with you. Will you help me with these things?

1. Help me find a quiet place where I can complete my School-Home Links activity sheet.
2. Read the instructions with me. I want to do my best work.
3. Help me if I have difficulty understanding.
4. Help me to remember to bring my work to school every day.

## When I bring a book home from school:

1. Let's look at the book together. Let me tell you about the pictures.
2. Read the book with me.
3. Help me find a place where I can keep my book so it will not get lost or damaged.
4. Remind me to use a plastic bag when I carry my book home and back to school each week.
5. Help me complete my Book Links activity about the book.

Thank you for helping me. It's a lot of fun to share my work with you.

Love,

\_\_\_\_\_

Parent's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Comments:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# 3 Sample Letter from Teacher to Parents

## Dear Family:

Attached is your child's first **School-Home Links** activity. Please go through this activity with your child. If your child is young, you may need to read the activity and help your child fill in the necessary information. If your child is older, encourage your child to read the activity and work on it with your involvement. When your child finishes the activity, please have your child sign the bottom of the page. We would like you to sign the paper also to show that you have gone over the activity with your child.

Later this week, we will begin a new program for our students called **Book Links**. The program will work as follows:

- Once a week, your child will choose a book to read from our classroom library, the school library, or your local library.
- If your child takes a book from school, your child will sign a book check-out card and put it in our class's Book Links check-out chart. He or she will put the book in a resealable plastic bag to take home.
- Your child will read the book at home with you, complete the Book Links activity sheet that goes with the book, and bring the book back to school the next day in a plastic bag.

The book may be one your child has heard before in class. Whether your child has heard the story before or not, he or she should read the book to or with you. You will need to read some of the books to your child, particularly if your child is just learning to read. Many people at home can be part of this book sharing by listening to or reading the stories with your child.

When reading with your child, please remember to:

- Introduce the book before you read it by letting your child flip through the pages—left to right—to look at the pictures.
- Ask your child to describe the beginning, middle, and end of the story after you read it together.
- Ask your child if he or she enjoyed the story and why. Talk about your favorite parts of the story and interesting characters.

Your child is responsible for the care of the borrowed book. Books should not be written in or torn. If a book is lost or damaged, the family is responsible for replacing the book. A child will not be allowed to borrow a new book until the first book is returned or replaced.

As you can see, we need your support and assistance to help your child continue learning to read, listen, and comprehend, as well as to become a responsible book borrower.

Finally, please remember to visit your public library's Children's Book Department to get a library card (if your child does not already have one), borrow, and read other books with your child.

Have fun reading!

Sincerely,

Mr. Bookman, First-Grade Teacher

Three to four times a week, select activity sheets from the *School-Home Links Reading Kit* that directly support instruction in school. Teachers have the ultimate flexibility in selecting *School-Home Links Reading Kit* activities that best meet the needs of individual children. Within any one classroom, some children already know the particular skill being taught and do not need further practice, some have some knowledge but need further practice, and others are unfamiliar with the skill and could benefit from a lot of practice. For every grade, multiple skill areas are addressed, with multiple activities for most skill areas. Over 100 activity sheets have been developed per grade. If

certain children are performing below or above grade, the teacher should pull activities from lower or higher grade levels as needed.

Teachers can use the coding system at the bottom of each page that shows the typical grade for the activity and the skill that activity sheet supports and develops in the child. For example, if a kindergarten teacher is teaching her students about upper- and lowercase letters, she chooses from the *School-Home Links Reading Kit* an activity that is coded “Kindergarten/Recognizes and Can Name All Uppercase and Lowercase Letters” (see next page).



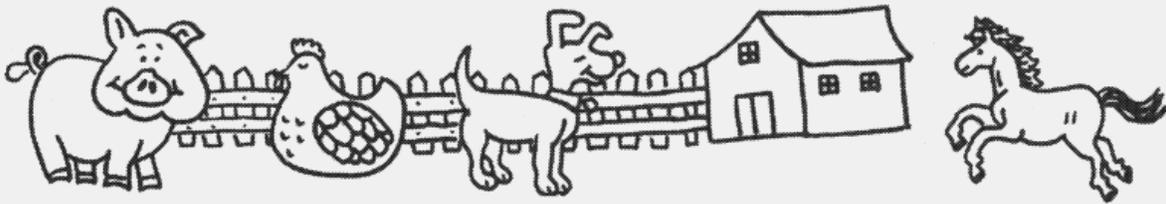
# 3 A Sample School-Home Links Reading Kit Activity

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Dear Family,** Your child is learning what a letter is and how to find letters on a page.

- Circle a letter in the story below.
- Circle a "p."
- Circle all the "m's" in the story.

## The Farm



I saw a pig on the farm.  
I saw some chickens on the farm.  
I saw a dog on the farm.  
I saw a horse on the farm.  
I liked the farm.

Child's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's (Learning Partner's) signature \_\_\_\_\_

K/Recognizes and Can Name All Uppercase and Lowercase Letters/1

## 5. Send Home One Book Links Activity a Week

In addition to doing the *School-Home Links Reading Kit* at home, teachers should encourage families to read to or with their children five days a week, 30 minutes a day. One of those days teachers will send home a School-Home Links **Book Links**

activity, a special type of School-Home Links that directs the child to think about a special aspect of book reading (see next page). Every Book Links activity asks the child to record the title and author of one book the child has read during the week with the family, as well as to complete an activity relating to literature.



# 3 A Sample Book Links Activity

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Dear Family,** Your child is learning to listen to a story and answer questions.

- Read a book with your family. Write the title and author of the book below.

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Author: \_\_\_\_\_

- Where does this story take place?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- Who is the main character in the story?

\_\_\_\_\_

- How are you like or different from the main character?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Child's signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Parent's (Learning Partner's) signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

K/Correctly Answers Questions About Stories/1

## **6. Arrange for Children to Borrow and Take Home Free Books**

Because many children do not have enough of grade-appropriate books at home, teachers need to arrange for sources of books for children in their classroom. The librarian from the local public library could come to the school and provide a library card for each child, with a map showing the libraries in the town or city. Schools could open their school library to children once a week for book selection. Or teachers may want to set up a Book Links Lending Library Program—a collection of grade- and ability-appropriate books that have been selected for the children in the classroom and are housed in the classroom—so that all students have the opportunity to borrow and read books each week.

In either case, teachers send books home with children once during the week and, if available and desired, on the weekends. Teachers can give each child a large reusable, plastic, resealable bag to keep the book safe and clean. The bag should have the child's name on it and be used again and again.

## **7. Encourage Families and Children to Read 30 Minutes a Day**

The child reads the book with a family member, completes a Book Links activity sheet about the book, and returns the book to class the next day. Because research shows that reading at least 30 minutes a day helps children become strong readers, it is suggested that all

Book Links reading activities be planned so that the students will read for at least 30 minutes. At the third-grade level, teachers may assign part of a chapter book, instead of a full book, to encourage children to read longer and more complex books.

## **8. Keep a Record of Home Book Reading in the Classroom**

A classroom check-out chart should be displayed in the classroom so that each child can enter the date a book is checked out and returned to the classroom. A child typically does not check out a new book until the first one is returned.

## **9. Help Students Track Completion of School-Home Links and Book Links**

Each morning, when students arrive in the classroom, they will hand in their School-Home Links or Book Links activity. You may want to develop a simple School-Home Links Chart where children can post a sticker for every day they complete an activity. The chart is posted in the classroom for the entire school year.

- Students use the chart as a tool for self-evaluation and feel a sense of accomplishment by seeing a row of stickers grow next to their name.
- Parents use the chart to see how their children are doing on completing and turning in School-Home Links/Book Links activities.
- Teachers use the chart to quickly identify students who are completing their activity sheets.

## **10. Help Families Who Do Not Speak English or Are Disabled**

Teachers are encouraged to help provide the necessary support to families who do not speak English or are disabled. Students whose parents speak other languages should turn in their assignments just as regularly as those with English-speaking parents. If these students do not turn in correct, completed assignments, teachers may arrange to:

- Translate the directions of the assignment in the relevant languages, or
- Help students complete the activity before or after school.

## **11. Help Families of Students Who Do Not Complete Their Assignments**

When students do not complete their assignments, teachers should continue to emphasize the family's role in implementing the Compact for Reading. This includes working with the children at home and making sure that students complete the assigned home activities. Teachers may use the monthly calendars

to remind parents to ask their children about the assigned home activities.

Such reminders do not eliminate the need to develop ways to work with children who do not complete their home assignments. Here is a list of ways to work on this issue:

- **For students who occasionally miss an assignment**

Have the student complete the assignment with a teaching assistant, parent volunteer, or the teacher before school or during recess.

- **For students who regularly do not complete assignments**

Call home or meet with the parents one-on-one, and work together to establish a plan to ensure that the student's assignments are completed. The key is to find better ways the teacher, parent, and student can work together to meet the expectations outlined in the school's Compact for Reading.



# The Parent's Role

## 1. Attend a School Training Workshop and Sign the Compact for Reading

The principal, reading coordinator, and teachers of children in kindergarten through third grade will convene a meeting with families of their students to inform the families about the Compact for Reading and their partnering role. Each parent or a family adult should sign the school's Compact for Reading as their commitment to work with their own children at home to support school work. The principal and the reading coordinator will describe how the *School-Home Links Reading Kit* program works.

## 2. Ask Your Child to Show You the Monthly School-Home Links Calendar and Display It in a Prominent Place in Your Home

Once a month, families will review the **School-Home Links Calendar** to keep up-to-date on school and classroom literacy events. This calendar will show the days on which home reading activities (School-Home Links and Book Links) are due. It could show the dates of parent workshops, the days the school or classroom library is open for children to select books to take home, the visit of a children's author to the school, or the days children visit the public library to take books out. At the bottom of each calendar are the teacher's contact information and a list of times the teacher is available to speak with families. This availability reinforces the essential, open line of communication that your school's Compact for Reading encourages.

## 3. Work with Your Child, or Ask the School for a Volunteer to Work with Your Child, on the School-Home Links, and Sign Each School-Home Link

Three to four times a week, School-Home Links will be sent home, and once a week Book Links will be sent home. Most activities are addressed to the child, but families of very young children will need to read the sheets for the child.

Families should ask their child to fill out his or her name at the top of the page, then read the boxed area that includes a message just for the family. It tells the family what the child is learning in school and lets the family know why the activity sheet has been assigned as homework for the child.

Families should ask their child to complete the activity in the middle of the sheet that reinforces work done in school that day or week. Finally, the family should ask the child to sign his or her name at the bottom of each page when the activity is done. The responsible family member will also sign each sheet at the bottom of the page.

If families ever need extra help to complete an activity, they should call the teacher and ask for help, or send a note at the bottom of the activity sheet asking the teacher to help the child that day.



## The Role of Community Volunteers

Your school's business and nonprofit community partners can play a major role in the success of your School-Home Links program and, subsequently, your school's Compact for Reading.

- **Tutors**

Personnel in local businesses and nonprofits can be approached to serve as tutors for children who most need help in reading. Hundreds of thousands of volunteers are currently tutoring children at lunch time or in after-school tutoring programs. If your school needs volunteer tutors, ask your community organizations to help you locate them.

- **Book donations**

Many schools do not have the resources to set up lending libraries of age-appropriate books in each classroom. In such cases, administrators, teachers, and parents may call on their local businesses and community agencies to help. School staff members might attend local chamber of commerce meetings to inform the business community of the literacy initiatives being implemented at your school, and ask for donations of gently used or new

books, or funds to start classroom lending libraries.

- **Photocopying Services**

Schools that do not have access to a photocopying machine or the extra funds to support the copying of the School-Home Links and Book Links activities, parent letters, and so on might also ask local businesses to help fund these services that support literacy.

### **Other Types of Activities to Implement the Compact for Reading:**

#### **Building a Lasting Capacity**

The School-Home Links program is only one suggested activity to fulfill your reading Compact. It is an unusually effective partnership builder, as well as an effective tool to improve students' learning and achievement, because it calls on multiple partners to improve student learning, communication, and capacity building. However, there are many other activities that can and should be conducted to meet the requirements of your Compact.



# EVALUATE YOUR COMPACT

# 4

## Agreeing On the Results to Measure

The goal of the fourth step of the Compact process is to evaluate your Compact. Evaluation offers your school community an opportunity to determine the strength of your Compact in improving student learning, communication, and capacity building.

The first step in evaluation is to develop a list of questions about the impact of your Compact on student learning, communication, and capacity building. You may want to know, for example:

- **Student Learning**

Has there has been any upward movement in students' skills and scores in reading or in other student outcomes, such as more library usage, more pleasure reading done, more time spent reading each day, or less TV time at home?

- **Communication**

Have lines of communication among school staff, families, and community members been strengthened?

- **Capacity Building**

Has the capacity of families to help their own children grown, and has this family involvement helped students learn more and better?

Continually evaluating your Compact allows you to check on whether the Compact is working as you intended it to work. This evaluation process enables you to catch problems early, so that you can correct your course for stronger and more effective outcomes. Also, as students, parents, and teachers see the progress that is being made, they have a greater incentive to keep working, with tools that help them work better. Moreover, evaluation sends a signal that the activity you are examining is important.

After basic questions are developed, you will want to develop performance indicators that can give you information on factors that may be associated with the success of your Compact. For example, an indicator of "upward movement in students' skills" would be increases in student test scores in reading (see the section following on "Individual Student Performance"). An indicator of "strengthened lines of communication" would be increases in the numbers of families who report that they are informed about the school's reading standards. An indicator of "a growing capacity of families to help their children in reading" would be increases in the percent of families that help their children complete the School-Home Links activities. See *Activity Sheet 4A* titled "Evaluating the Quality of the Compact Process" for more performance indicators that can be used to collect such information.

# 4 EVALUATE THE COMPACT

## Activity Sheet A: Evaluating the Quality of the Compact Process

Schools	Families	Students
<b>Shared Responsibility for Supporting Learning</b>		
<p><b>Knowledge of reading standards</b></p> <p>___% of families report that they know what the school's reading standards are. (survey)</p> <p>___% of families report that the school shows them examples of actual work at different levels of reading performance. (survey, observation)</p>	<p>___% of families and ___% of teachers report that families have high expectations of their children and expect them to be able to read independently by the end of the third grade. (survey)</p>	<p>Teachers report that ___% of students are highly motivated, ask questions to clarify what is expected of them, and seek help when there is something they do not understand. (survey)</p>
<p><b>Attendance</b></p> <p>___% of teachers were absent more than ten days. (admin. records)</p>	<p>___% of families and ___% of teachers and school staff report that families monitor their children's attendance. (survey)</p>	<p>___% of students were absent 10 or more days in the past year. (admin. records)</p>
<p><b>Quality of reading instruction and support</b></p> <p>___% of families and ___% of students indicate that the instructional program is challenging and that it is tailored to students who progress at different rates. (survey)</p> <p>___% of teachers have credentials/training to teach their subject. (admin. records)</p>	<p>___% of parents indicate positive attitudes toward reading with their child. (survey)</p> <p>___% of parents read a book or story with their child at least 30 minutes most days. (survey, admin. records of completion of Book Links activities)</p>	<p>___% of students show a positive attitude toward reading. (observation, survey)</p> <p>___% of students show that they read a book or story for at least 30 minutes most days. (survey, admin. records on Book Links activities)</p>
<p><b>Completion of school-home activities</b></p> <p>___% of families and ___% of students report that meaningful activities are assigned and returned promptly with teacher comments. (survey)</p>	<p>___% of families and ___% of teachers report that families supervise completion of home activities and sign completed assignments. (survey, admin. records)</p>	<p>___% of teachers report that students come to school with home reading activities completed. (survey)</p>

# 4 EVALUATE THE COMPACT

## Activity Sheet A: Evaluating the Quality of the Compact Process

(Continued)

Schools	Families	Students
<b>Shared Responsibility for Communicating</b>		
<p><b>Communicating on student progress</b></p> <p>___% of teachers have access to phones in their classroom to communicate with families. (admin. records)</p> <p>___% of families report that the school holds parent-teacher conferences at convenient times and locations. (survey)</p> <p>School translates information and materials into all relevant languages. (admin. records)</p> <p>___ Yes ___ No</p>	<p>___% of families regularly attend parent-teacher conferences. (admin. records)</p>	<p>___% of students talk with their families about school. (survey, observation)</p>
<p><b>School climate</b></p> <p>___% of families and ___% of students indicate that they feel welcome at the school and that the school respects their opinions. (survey)</p>	<p>___% of school staff and teachers indicate that families are responsive to their concerns. (survey)</p>	<p>___% of teachers report that students are respectful of one another and of teachers. (survey, observation)</p>
<b>Shared Responsibility for Building Capacity</b>		
<p><b>Training and resources</b></p> <p>___% of participating teachers and school staff have received training in the Compact for Reading. (admin. records)</p>	<p>___% of families participate in workshops to learn how they can help their children learn to read and do well in school. (admin. records)</p>	<p>___% of students trained to tutor peers is reading. (admin. records)</p>
<p><b>Volunteering</b></p> <p>___% of families report that the school provides high-quality, well-organized opportunities to volunteer at the school. (survey)</p>	<p>___% of families volunteer at the school, including helping students learn how to read. (admin. records)</p> <p>___% of volunteers report that they actively recruit new families to help out at the school. (survey)</p>	<p>___% of students volunteer at the school or in the community, including helping each other learn to read. (admin. records)</p>



A word of caution: Gathering and analyzing data can be expensive and time-consuming. Therefore, your school should measure only what is important and, make certain that what is important is measured. While some data can be collected and analyzed quite easily by members of the Core Team, other information can be more difficult to get and may require the help of your district or state evaluation staff, or university partners who specialize in research and evaluation.

### **Assessing How Well Your Students Are Reading**

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The ultimate goal of your Compact for Reading is for more students to be reading at higher levels of proficiency. Basic readers should be developing into proficient readers, and proficient readers should be acquiring the skills of advanced readers.

You need to look at your students' reading progress on two levels:

- How are individual students performing in reading?
- How is the school as a whole (all the students) performing in reading?

#### ***Individual Student Performance***

Many different kinds of information can be obtained on student performance in reading, ranging from very informal measures of progress, like skills checklists, to more formal measures of performance, such as standardized reading tests administered by the school, typically for the district or state. Each of these measures has particular strengths as well as weaknesses. There is not simply one good test of reading ability.

To measure performance in your school for your students, a range of informal and formal assessments is most useful. Some quick-to-administer, informal assessments enable teachers to easily gauge student progress in early literacy skills and get immediate feedback to guide further instruction. More formal group assessments provide an overall picture of where groups of children stand in reading ability and achievement.

#### ***Informal Checklists of Skills***

Informal checklists of skills that most children have by grade, developmental, or proficiency level can indicate very quickly which skills the child has or needs further work on, and can show at what level a child is reading.

#### ***Informal Reading Inventories***

These quick-to-administer reading tests, such as the Running Record and the Informal Reading Inventory, permit teachers to determine students' reading strengths, weaknesses, readability levels, and fluency. The Running Record, for example, requires that each child read 100 words of text out loud to the teacher. The teacher notes the time it takes the child to read the passage, and the accuracy with which the child reads the passage. Teachers can administer Running Records multiple times during the year to note progress in fluency as well as accuracy in reading.

#### ***Student Home Reports***

Several times a year, teachers develop grades or scores that reflect students' performance on classroom reading, written work, and classroom tests. Grades are very broad indicators of performance and are more likely to be subjective than other assessments.

### ***Direct Observation***

Observations of individual students' reading behaviors and attitudes can be helpful in determining reading progress. Observations that obtain information on students' enthusiasm for reading, confidence in reading, and recognition that reading requires hard work and practice can be strong indicators of reading success.

### ***Formal Standardized Reading Assessments***

Many states and most large districts administer formal assessments in which performance in reading and other language arts is assessed in one section of the overall assessment. Some examples are:

- **Norm-referenced tests**, such as the Stanford Achievement Test, Ninth Edition; California Achievement Test (CAT); and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS); or standardized state reading tests;
- **Criterion-referenced tests** developed to measure a state's core curriculum such as Texas' Test of Academic Achievement Skills (TAAS) or Georgia's Curriculum-Based Assessment Program; and
- **Performance-based measures** such as Vermont's portfolio assessment system or the multiple assessment system being used in Kentucky.

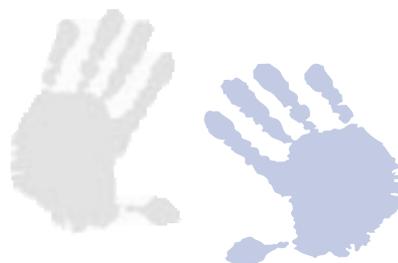
### ***School Performance***

Your school's performance in reading is determined by adding up the progress made by individual students in reading. A good way to understand your school's reading progress is to chart your students'

scores at the school level and across a number of subpopulations in the school (e.g., by grade, ethnicity/race, special populations such as Title I, limited-English-proficient, and disabled students).

When reviewing student scores before and after the implementation of the Compact for Reading, your Core Team should ask about:

- **Continuous improvement**  
Do your results show that students are reading better than before? Are they doing better than in prior years? Are they doing better than in the earlier grades?
- **Comparative performance**  
Do your results show that your students are doing as well as students in the best-performing schools that serve similar types of children?
- **Absolute performance**  
Do your results show that your students are reaching your school's desired level of performance?
- **Small-group performance**  
Do your results show that different groups of students (racial/ethnic groups of students; Title I students with disabilities; limited-English-proficient students) are making substantial progress?



## **Supporting Learning, Communication, and Capacity Building**

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Your Core Team should also look at the extent to which the Compact has led to improved support of learning activities, to improved communication among the partners who signed the Compact and are responsible for improvement in reading in your school, and improved capacity to advance the effective teaching and learning of reading.

At least once a year, the Core Team should conduct an evaluation of how well your school-family partnership is working to fulfill the commitments made in your Compact for Reading.

*Activity Sheet 4A* provides indicators your school may use to summarize the quality of your Compact's implementation. *Activity Sheet 4B* provides a worksheet for detailing what the Compact partners are doing well and what areas need further improvement.

To determine how well your Compact is working, (1) ask participants how it is working (i.e., conduct surveys); (2) review routinely collected information (i.e., examine administrative records); (3) observe students, staff, and parents (i.e., keep anecdotal notes); and (4) conduct in-depth discussions (i.e., hold focus-group sessions).

### **Surveys**

Surveys ask school staff, parents, participating community members, and students their opinions about and experiences with reading and learning. Survey responses tell about partner expectations, provide judgments about the quality of learning experiences and materials, and address whether the partners are communicating well and respectfully with each other. Make sure that your surveys are truly representative of your school's population by language,

race, and parents' educational level. Remember that everyone's views count. In general, companies strive to have at least half of their questionnaires returned. High-quality surveys receive at least 7 out of 10 returned.

### **Administrative Records**

You may use the records your school routinely collects. Routine records may cover students' attendance rates and completion of home learning activities; amount of training for teachers, parents, and volunteers; and levels of participation in the Compact. Such data should be reviewed periodically for accuracy and completeness.

### **Observation**

Direct observation provides rich information that cannot be obtained through surveys or written records. Observations reveal student attitudes and behaviors and are often part of the informal reading assessments previously described.

When observing students, observers must have set criteria for what to look for and what criteria indicate success or quality. Furthermore, it is worthwhile to review the materials themselves, to assess their quality and value.

### **Focus Groups**

Focus groups are small-group discussion sessions to test and review materials, such as the School-Home Links activities. A group of parents and teachers sitting around a table assume the role of market testers who assess the clarity, appropriateness, and usefulness of materials. Focus groups are also useful for discovering and addressing barriers to communication. Focus groups should be representative of your school's population or, upon occasion, targeted to groups of families who are harder to reach.

# 4 EVALUATE THE COMPACT

## Activity Sheet B: A Final Tally of What We Are Doing Well and What We Can Improve (Continued)

**Directions:** For each major focus area, determine what you are doing well. Then describe what areas can be improved.

Area	What We Are Doing Well	What We Can Improve
<b>Shared Responsibility for Supporting Learning</b>		
<b>Knowledge of reading standards</b>		
<b>Attendance</b>		
<b>Quality of reading instruction and support</b>		
<b>Completion of school-home activities</b>		

# 4 EVALUATE THE COMPACT

## Activity Sheet B: A Final Tally of What We Are Doing Well and What We Can Improve

**Directions:** For each major focus area, determine what you are doing well. Then describe what areas can be improved.

Area	What We Are Doing Well	What We Can Improve
<b>Shared Responsibility for Communicating</b>		
Communicating on student progress		
School climate		
<b>Shared Responsibility for Building Capacity</b>		
Training and resources		
Volunteering		

# STRENGTHEN YOUR COMPACT

# 5

The goal of the last step in the Compact process is for your Core and Invention Teams to strengthen your Compact by building on successes documented during Step 4 (Evaluation) and improving in areas documented as needing improvement.

During this step, you will develop solutions to challenges, determine action steps, and revise your Compact as needed. You can use *Activity Sheet 5A* to develop an improvement plan.

This last step is extremely important because it allows partners to step back and praise themselves for what is going well in your school community to help children improve their reading skills and achievement. It is also a time to look at what has not been going well and to seek new solutions. These new solutions will provide information for revising your Compact for Reading, if necessary. Ask yourself: Are the right partners making the right commitments? Do new commitments need to be made? Are there enough people with the right training and expertise to make this work? Are there sufficient funds to support the commitments in the Compact? Fine-tuning your Compact is essential if everyone is to know what needs to be done and do the best job.

## **Generating Solutions for Thorny Challenges**

Every school community faces challenges. Compact Teams can use the following approaches to generate solutions for these challenges:

- **Brainstorm** at your school Compact meetings. The collective wisdom of a team is far greater than that of each member. Use your team to look around your school for opportunities to operate better and more efficiently. You might start by asking a series of questions: Do some strategies seem to be working for certain students, families, and teachers that could be applied throughout the school? Are there better ways to allocate resources? Are staff schedules arranged to support learning and home-school communications? What types of training are helpful to staff and families in teaching or reinforcing reading? Are some school staff and parents particularly effective at overcoming difficulties? Answers to these questions can help guide school improvement throughout the school.
- **Review the reading research.** The recently published National Academy of Sciences' report, *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*, is an outstanding summary of an enormous body of reading research on "what works" in reading. The U.S. Department of Education is supporting nontechnical summaries of this report that can guide you through the findings.
- **Look for solid reading models.** Some of the best ideas in teaching reading have been packaged into model programs. Some models with a clear emphasis on reading include the New American Schools Corporation models, Success for All, Early Literacy Learning Initiative, Family Literacy, and Books and Beyond. There are others that have similar emphases.

# 5 STRENGTHEN YOUR COMPACT

## Activity Sheet A: Your Improvement Plan

**Directions:** Make a list of your successes (strengths) and a list of areas needing improvement below. Use the following worksheet to design an improvement plan for each area identified.

**Area identified for improvement:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Why improvement is needed** (based on progress toward standards and local, state, and national comparisons):

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**Improvement Strategies.** How will you strengthen your actions in this area? What specific actions will you take with reference to learning, to communication, and to volunteering and training? How will each partner contribute to the effort?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

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2. \_\_\_\_\_

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Do you need to make any specific changes to the Compact document itself?

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Before deciding on one model, ask its creators for their research evidence of effectiveness. Consider models that have a strong parent involvement component.

- **Visit successful schools.** Find the time and resources for school staff and parents to visit neighboring schools. Seeing how other schools successfully tackle the same problems you have provides solid training and reinforces continuous improvement.
- **Obtain outside advice.** Experts in the field can cut through the jargon and help you understand the different reading approaches and strategies for assisting families and involving communities. Your school district, state education agency, and local colleges and universities are good places to start for advice on effective practices. At the national level, the U.S. Department of Education supports Comprehensive Assistance Centers and ERIC clearinghouses that can be of help (see Appendix D, Key Resources).
- **Look on the Web.** The World Wide Web is a new resource that is available on any day and at any time (see Appendix D, Key Resources for sites that can be helpful).

## **Sample Challenges and Solutions**

### **Challenge #1: My school has a sound Compact but it is not used.**

#### ***Solutions:***

- Give your Compact Core Team clear responsibility for setting guidelines and monitoring use.

- Put the Compact on the agenda of every major school meeting relating to improvement.
- Consider including School-Home Links as one part of student report cards.
- Provide resources that are targeted specifically to implementing Compact responsibilities.
- Hold staff accountable for implementing their Compact responsibilities as part of their annual performance assessment.
- Publicize the Compact through signs, posters, and newsletters, and at parent meetings—it is said that it takes many reminders before people remember something new.
- Recognize Compact successes through newsletters, end-of-year parent achievement awards, and thank-you notes.
- Use the school calendar as a reminder about Compact events and obligations.

### **Challenge #2: School staff want to do more to fulfill the Compact, but they simply do not have the time.**

#### ***Solutions:***

- Assign to each school staff member—including the principal, other school administrators, and teacher specialists—a group of families with whom they are to keep in regular contact. Sharing communication responsibilities among all the school staff, not just the homeroom teachers, reduces the requirements on any one teacher.
- Give staff access to the telephone, preferably a telephone in the classroom, to facilitate family communication. In this age of modern electronic communications, schools remain one of the last places where a professional does not typically have easy access to the telephone.

- Use Title I resources to help pay for a parent coordinator to contact families. In districts receiving \$500,000 or more, Title I reserves at least one percent for parental involvement activities.
- Ask parent volunteers to help get parents involved.
- Use paraprofessionals or student teachers to relieve teachers of noninstructional duties, such as lunch room, study hall, and recess, allowing them to spend greater time on supporting core activities in your Compact.
- Provide a recorded message informing parents of classroom and school activities. Allow parents to leave messages detailing their reactions and concerns.

**Challenge #3: Although a few parents have been very supportive of the Compact, many others are uninvolved.**

***Solutions:***

- Conduct a survey or focus group to find out why certain parents are having difficulty in fulfilling their Compact responsibilities and how the school can help.
- Send home information translated in the family's home language and adapted to the needs of parents with disabilities. Non-English-speaking families may want to use School-Home Links as a way to improve their own English, once they understand its purpose.
- Have frequent teacher-family calls to improve home-school relationships.
- Provide transportation for evening meetings.

- Hold Compact meetings in nonschool settings, such as local community centers or churches, where parents may feel more comfortable.
- Conduct home visits to demonstrate the willingness of school staff to go more than halfway to involve all parents in their children's education.
- Provide a welcoming and friendly atmosphere by offering food at school meetings, sending home letters, and making a call to each parent introducing yourself at the start of the year.
- Reinforce the importance of family involvement by posting meeting dates for special family events in local restaurants, churches, and other meeting places.

**Challenge #4: Our children are making reading progress during the school year, but many lose those gains during the summer.**

***Solutions:***

- Participate in America Reads Challenge: READ\*WRITE\*NOW! school and community reading programs that team students with reading partners and require students to read at least 30 minutes a day.
- Offer extended summer school programs, like those in Chicago and Washington, D.C., to rigorously reinforce reading.
- Work with voluntary organizations, such as AmeriCorps or college and high school students, to obtain summer volunteer tutors.

**Challenge #5: The School-Home Links examples are very helpful, but my school would like to add some activities to the Kit.**

***Solutions:***

- The School-Home Links provided in the Compact for Reading are only examples of activities that can be developed to reinforce classroom learning. Your reading coordinator or teachers can supplement these examples with others.
- Match the School-Home Links against your state or local reading standards and identify topics that need additional activities.
- Survey parents to determine if the School-Home Links are working particularly well or are too difficult or not worth doing.
- Ask the publisher of your school's reading materials whether they have already developed parent activities to supplement your School-Home Links.
- Go to the U.S. Department of Education Web site for more School-Home Links (<http://www.ed.gov>).



**Challenge #6: My school needs more reading resources to provide the effective instructional program envisioned in our Compact for Reading.**

***Solutions:***

- Ask for Federal Work-Study Program volunteers from your local college or university to help with tutoring, because they can obtain federal student aid assistance to help in your school.
- Contact your local Corporation for National Service representative who can tell you more about coordination and tutoring help from AmeriCorps, Learn and Serve, VISTA, Foster Grandparents, and other corporation-funded programs.
- Ask employers to support your school's reading program by providing books and other reading resources to support the Compact. Encourage employers to provide flexitime or leavetime so employees can volunteer in the school, or distribute information throughout the community on the need for resources. Integrate their assistance into your school's systemic improvement.
- Review all state and federal programs—such as Title I, Even Start, Reading Is Fundamental, special education, or bilingual education—for possible reading support.
- Extend reading time and assistance through your school's after-school program, including those receiving 21st Century school grants.
- Use your school's computers to reinforce reading.

## Notes

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