



## COMPACT TOOL #4:

### GRADE LEVEL INPUT: CAPTURING GOOD IDEAS

The first step is to meet in grade-level data teams and figure out what teachers and parents need to work on:

1. Use your data to identify your greatest challenges: What skills do your data show that students need to strengthen most? List these.
2. Prioritize these by degree of need – what will help develop the other skills in the long run? Which skills are the building blocks for other skills? Pick no more than two priority areas for your compact.
3. Develop two or three “bang-for-your-buck” strategies that parents can use at home to develop each of these skills. Remember, these are \*draft\* strategies to help you jump-start the conversation with parents. Parents will be an important part of finalizing the strategies you eventually use. And if they have a voice in these strategies, parents are much more likely to use them.
4. How can you help parents use these strategies? What information might parents need to do them effectively? For example, the literacy coach could develop three workshops on literacy, such as reviewing sight words on a daily basis at home, making text-to-self connections, and building a word wall on the fridge. Each month, teachers can send home a list of words on colored paper and parents can log or check the words their child has mastered. Strategies like these build families’ confidence as their child’s first teachers and expand their vocabulary, too.

The next step is to hear from parents. After you explain what skills and knowledge students should be focusing on, give them time to ask questions and come up with ideas about what they can do. Be sure to ask parents what information and support they will need from teachers to help their children practice their reading and math skills.

Last, finalize your strategies. Think about what parents suggested. Perhaps they want to see how you teach reading. Host a classroom visit to show how you do a read-aloud and use a word wall. They may not be sure how to build math skills. Offer a themed workshop series on everyday math (i.e, Family Math Safari Nights) and send home math learning games for the family to play.

What are schools that have revitalized their School-Family Compacts doing? How do they reach out and engage their families? Here are a few examples.

At Macdonough Elementary School in Middletown, teachers invited families to friendly evening events focused on learning, such as an Author’s Tea, organized by grade level. Principal Jon Romeo said, “We didn’t mention compacts, because we thought they’d stay away. Instead we enticed them with a fun event featuring their children.”



Afterwards, teachers pulled parents into the library to share ideas about improving students' reading. Teachers explained the grade-level goals and showed how they would be working on them in the classroom. Parents came up with ideas about how to help their children: read aloud, go to the library, write letters. Teachers told parents they would send home reading materials home to get students into the habit of reading. Parents countered by asking teachers to "tell us exactly what you want us to work on and how we can help. What are you doing in class?"

Teachers were delighted that parents wanted to know about classroom strategies. At grade-level meetings that followed, they showed parents things like making text-to-self connections. Parents said, "Oh, we can do that!"

At M.D. Fox Elementary School in Hartford, a school with a large immigrant community, two literacy coaches began the compact process. They invited families, many of whom are new arrivals to the country, to a dinner discussion in the school library about helping students be successful learners. After sharing tips about how to encourage their children's reading, teachers asked two questions:

1. What do teachers need to do to help students?
2. What can the school do to help parents support their children?

The families had lots of ideas. These were shared with more families to expand the list, then teachers at each grade level identified recurring themes to put into their compacts. "Parents were much more willing to do things than we thought they'd be," one of the literacy coaches said. Teachers designed activities for different grade levels in response to parents' suggestions.

For example, many parents said they didn't understand what children do in kindergarten -- do they just play or do they learn to read? Teachers responded with an orientation to kindergarten, explaining the program and sharing learning materials. Almost 90 percent of the parents attended.

Bielefield Elementary School in Middletown took a different tack. At the parent-teacher conversations, a major issue came up. Students were not taking pride in their work and were handing in sub-par papers that showed a lack of motivation to excel. The whole building were involved. The parent organization began holding exhibits of student work. Teachers and students developed a rubric that described three levels of effort and time on task. The top level is "My best effort. I thought and tried my hardest. I spent enough time to give my brain quality time. I carefully reread and revised my work."

Teachers sent the rubric home and parents signed off. Parents agreed to review their children's work and discuss where it fell on the rubric. At parent-teacher conferences, the rubric is referred to in assessing students' efforts. The quality of work throughout the school has improved. All students have produced at least one "pride paper."