

Tip Sheet: Linking a School-Family Compact to Learning

What's a Compact? In a compact, families and school staff agree how to work together. Every Title I school must develop a school-family compact, according to the No Child Left Behind law (Section 1118). Teachers and parents like compacts because they make it clear who should do what to encourage students. Students like being treated as a responsible person. The compact should describe:

- What parents, school staff, and students will do to improve student progress
- How the school and families will build a partnership to help children learn
- How the school and families will communicate regularly with each other.

How is a Compact Linked to Learning? Here are some suggestions:

1. Check your school's test data. Look for areas where students' scores are low, and for gaps between different groups of students.
2. Set two or three goals for improvement. If reading scores are low, adopt a goal of moving all students out of the bottom quartile ("below basic"), and moving more students into proficient.
3. Ask parents, students, and school staff what THEY should do to meet the goals. Then ask each group to list what it wants the OTHERS to do.
4. Focus on issues raised in the discussions, such as homework, communications, and rules of behavior. For each one, list what parents, teachers and students can do.
5. Draw up a first draft, then ask for comments. Revise it based on how parents, teachers and students react.

Revising Compacts: Compare the old-style compact at the left with a compact that focuses on improving students' reading and math skills.

Old Style Compact: "This compact will promote effective working relationships to improve student achievement."	Compact Linked to Learning: "This compact pledges our school community to increase student reading and math skills so that all students will be proficient by the end of third grade."
Parents Pledge: I will <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Send my child to school every day • Keep in contact with school once a month • Support the school dress and discipline codes • Be an active participant in my child's learning process • Limit TV watching time 	Parents Pledge: I will <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let the teacher know if my child has any problems with learning. • Use reading and math materials the school sends home each week to help my child. • Read to my child 20 minutes a day. • Keep a list of new words, and link letters to sounds. • Play numbers games with my child every week • Help my child see how to use reading and math to pursue his/her interests and goals.
Students Pledge: I will <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete my classwork • Come to school prepared to learn • Respect adults, myself and other students 	Students Pledge: I will <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let my teacher and family know if I need help • Read on my own and with my family every day • Work on my math and reading skills at home, using the materials my teacher sends home

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obey school rules • Complete my homework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write down assignments, do my homework every day, and turn it in when it's due • Write a report each week about a TV program I watch
<p>Teachers Pledge: We will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have high expectations for all students • Develop a classroom climate that is comfortable for all students • Develop proficient learners • Enforce rules fairly and consistently • Provide the books and necessary supplies for education 	<p>Teachers Pledge: We will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a partnership with every family in my class • Monitor student progress in reading and math and update parents monthly • Make sure all students get help as soon as it's needed • Send home learning materials in math and reading • Explain my approach to teaching, expectations, and grading system to students and their families • Continually work on my teaching strategies so that I can successfully teach <i>all</i> children. • Assign work that is relevant and interesting • Make sure students understand the assignment and what they'll learn from it, and grade it promptly.

Hazards Ahead Here are some things to watch out for:

- ❖ Keep the pledges about equal in length for each group. Don't list 15 obligations for parents and only five for teachers.
- ❖ Make the lists short -- no more than ten items for each group.
- ❖ Don't patronize parents. A typical pitfall: "I will make sure my child is clean and rested." (Parents might react, "Why would they even think I wouldn't do that?")
- ❖ Offer clear guidelines. Rather than "limit TV time," try, "limit TV to one program a day." Then teachers could ask students to interview their parents about the program.

Other Pointers

Y Include information that will help parents and students know how to do what's expected. Or follow up with some tip sheets. Instead of: "I will talk to my child about school daily," try: "When I talk to my child each day about school, I'll ask questions that can't be answered just with yes or no. Through the week, I'll try to cover what they're learning, what they like about school, and any problems they're having."

Use the compact at parent-teacher conferences and other meetings. Discuss how each side is doing in sticking to the pledges. Ask if other measures are needed.

Y Revisit the compact every year. Review its effectiveness with families, students, teachers and other school staff. Ask each group how they think it could be better. Update it using the most recent data.

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