

# **COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS PLANNING GUIDE**

# **INTRODUCTION**

**Dear Reader:**

**This electronic version of the Community Conversations Planning Guide is being distributed to those whose communities have already received hard copies of the guide. This version will be missing items such as sample invitations, a sample recruitment grid, and reading materials.**

**If you need any information that you don't find here, please contact either of us. Meanwhile, we hope that you will find having the material electronically supports your efforts.**

**All the best,**

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# **PLANNING GUIDE**

## **COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS ABOUT EDUCATION**

### **BACKGROUND**

Congratulations! This Planning Guide is given to communities who have successfully applied for a Community Conversation grant. You will have lots of hard work and fun ahead of you. Successful conversations have been held in over 100 Connecticut cities and towns. They have led to myriad local initiatives around education. Most of your conversations will be in a single community, but occasionally regional groups of two or three neighboring communities have come together for a regional conversation. This Guide can be used for both types of Conversations.

The Planning Guide, originally conceived by the Institute for Educational Leadership and Public Agenda, has been adapted and revised specifically for Connecticut's Conversations. The Guide leads the local Planning Committee through the process step-by-step.

Since 1997 Connecticut citizens have come together in community-wide conversations to discuss educational issues of importance to them. Issues such as Parent Involvement, School Safety, Bullying, and the Purposes of Education have engaged residents of cities, suburbs, and rural areas of our State. These Community Conversations are funded by the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund of Hamden, CT.

### **PLANNING COMMITTEE**

Your **first task** is to create a Planning Committee of about 20 local residents. You also have the option of including non-residents who care about your community, such as people who own businesses or hold jobs there. You need a diverse group of planners to make your invitation process much easier. Include a mix of old timers and newcomers, educators, clergy, employers, immigrants, senior citizens, high school and college students, local government officials, ethnic and language minorities, etc.

For regional Conversation Planning Committees you will need to carefully balance participation, so for two communities, ten from each; for three communities, roughly seven each.

At the **first full meeting** of the Planning Committee you will pick a topic and a tentative date for your event. You will want to check school and government calendars to choose a time that does not conflict with significant events, avoiding, for instance, the town-wide soccer tournament or high school graduation.

For detailed information on Planning Committee tasks, please see TAB 4.

# **THE COMMUNITY CONVERSATION**

## **COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS ABOUT EDUCATION**

Through the support of the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund, Community Conversations about Education has brought citizens in cities and towns across Connecticut together to participate in conversations about educational issues.

Using a model developed by Public Agenda and the Institute for Educational Leadership, conversations about education help communities to find common ground for public action and ways to work together to address educational issues. Conversations are respectful discussions, characterized by full and diverse participation, where real questions are asked, time is shared, and mutual listening and learning happen. The conversation model works.

Community Conversations:

- Provide opportunities for people from diverse backgrounds to speak openly with each other in a safe setting;
- Allow participants to voice personal views on important educational issues through the process of dialogue and discussion;
- Help find common ground for action among participants who may approach these issues with different perspectives; and
- Support participants as they explore differences so that people previously at odds with one another align on objectives and strategies.

Communities are encouraged to go forward to build upon the outcomes of their initial conversations. Participants often wish to meet again, hold additional conversations, take on projects, or change educational policies. Communities are now putting greater emphasis on follow-up and next steps. Prompt follow-up fosters continuity, captures the enthusiasm, and generates momentum to bring about positive change.

### **Description:**

A Conversation should be scheduled for approximately 4 hours, including time for a light meal, opening remarks, small group discussions, wrap-up, and closing. A good target number for your first Community Conversation is about 100 participants.

Participants gather for a light dinner on a weeknight, or breakfast if a Saturday event is planned. The meal is followed by a brief introduction, after which the participants break out into small groups of 15-20. As far as possible, each small group should be representative of the diversity of the full group of participants. The small groups meet (and end) at the same time and discuss the same topic. A trained moderator guides each discussion and recorders ensure that participants' ideas and comments are accurately documented. Participants come together again for a closing discussion to share common themes and plan next steps. Participants also complete an evaluation survey.

## **Goals for Community Conversations:**

The overarching goal is to promote rich and productive discussion among a representative cross-section of the community. Specific objectives are to:

- Advance understanding and broaden the perspectives of all stakeholders in education – educators, parents, students, employers, higher education professionals, civic leaders, elected officials, members of the media, and members of the general public – by providing a neutral setting in which they can come together, interact with one another, and share their views.
- Engage in the discussion members of the community who are not typically involved in school meetings.
- Generate conversations that begin with the public’s starting point as much as with that of education experts.
- Give people an opportunity to consider alternative approaches – each with its own set of values and tradeoffs.
- Help people think and talk through basic values, concerns, and assumptions that underlie their views.
- Help participants discover common ground and clarify important disagreements that need to be addressed.
- Raise important issues and questions, and provide participants with new information, contacts, and resources they can use in future deliberations.
- Begin to identify common ground for action and explore possible steps to engage the larger community in action to improve education.

## **Discussion Structure and Topics:**

Discussion materials involve choices about directions schools and communities might take to address particular educational issues. These choices have been carefully crafted to be fair and balanced, and to elicit stimulating and productive dialogue. They are not meant to offer all the alternatives possible on a given educational issue, but to be helpful conversation starters that stimulate participants to sort through what is most important to them in their own local community.

Research has shown that presenting people with real choices, each representing a broad perspective based on a distinct set of values and priorities, greatly enhances the quality of public dialogue. Organizing the discussion around choices helps the conversation by:

- Establishing a common reference point for participants and keeping the discussion focused;
- Steering the conversation away from a narrow, technical discussion of the issues toward a broader discussion of goals, priorities, and values implied by the choices;
- Giving the participants an opportunity to consider different perspectives side by side, listening fully to the pros and cons, and different values, of each choice;
- Expanding people's perspectives, giving them an opportunity to question their initial thinking and judgment;
- Helping participants become more realistic when considering the issues. People realize that there is no one perfect solution and that each alternative comes with certain costs and tradeoffs. By working with choices, participants gain a better understanding of the complexity of these issues and the need, ultimately, to make a decision among imperfect solutions;
- Putting people into the role of active problem solvers, as opposed to passively reacting to solutions offered by experts. The choices present real-world scenarios that participants, through the help of the moderator, can apply to their own community or school. When people have the opportunity to personalize an issue, they "connect" with it more and become more eager to work toward a solution.

The Planning Committee selects the conversation topic. The following guide includes summaries of discussion topics and the choice frameworks presented in video, printed, and electronic materials.



## Topic Summaries

Community Conversations use a structured format that focuses on only one topic for each Conversation. The small group discussion lasts from 90 to 105 minutes. Less than 90 minutes is inadequate to explore the topic fully.

The Conversation follows a **choice** format. Each topic is viewed from **three or more perspectives or approaches**. There is no right or wrong answer. The “choice work” is designed to jumpstart the discussion.

To present the discussion topic, communities use original PowerPoints or videos that we provide that were produced by Public Agenda. In recent years we have found that the majority of planning groups have wanted to create their own PowerPoints.

No matter which form the conversation starter takes, it always uses three or four different approaches. Community Conversation consultants are happy to provide technical assistance in creating the discussion starters.

PowerPoints from other communities have been adapted by inserting local information and pictures. For example PowerPoints for the topic of “Bullying” have been used by a large city, a suburban community, and a small town.

**PowerPoints** that individual local communities have developed include:

- Academic Expectations and Standards
- Adult Literacy
- Asset Building
- Bullying: End the Hurt
- Bullying: The Nature of Society or 21<sup>st</sup> Century Youth Crisis?
- Challenges of Fatherhood
- Child Care
- Children’s Wellness
- Closing the Achievement Gap
- Closing Connecticut’s Achievement Gap for Children and Youth with Disabilities
- Community and School Safety
- Creating a Safer school and Community Climate for Our Students
- Creating a Safer Community and School Climate for our Residents and Students
- Cultivating Character: Planting the Seed
- Developmental Assets
- Diversity and Tolerance in Schools and the Greater Community
- Drug Awareness and Substance Abuse
- Early Childhood Education and Child Care
- Educating Students in a Global Society
- Educating for Global Sustainability
- Facility Needs in a School System

Family Learning  
Finding the Balance  
Future of Our Community and Children: Why the Early Years Matter!  
\*Helping All Students Succeed in a Diverse Society  
High School: The Future for All students  
Infant and Toddler Care  
Improving the plan for student success  
Improving Youth and Law Enforcement Relationships Through Dialogue  
It Takes a Village....  
Keeping Kids Safe by Exploring the Dress Code  
\*Neighborhood Schools and Diversity  
Our Kids are Our Future. How Should We Educate Them?  
Our Strategic Plan  
Parent and Community Involvement  
Preparing Our Children for the future  
Promoting Healthy Choices for Adolescent Girls  
Promoting Tolerance and an Appreciation of Diversity  
Public Schools and Sexual Minority Urban Students  
Purposes of Public Education  
Quality of Life for Families with Young Children  
The Question of School Choice  
Racially Rebalancing a School System  
School/Family/Community Partnerships  
School Funding  
School Readiness  
School Safety  
Sheff v O'Neill: Moving Forward  
Strengthening Collaboration between Pre-K and Kindergarten  
Substance Abuse in School  
Teaching Methods  
The Difference a Dad Makes  
The Kindergarten Experience  
The State of Early Childhood Education  
Visions for 2018: Choice or Chance  
Ways to Foster Acceptance and Respect of Sexual Minorities  
What Do Young People Need to Thrive?  
What Would a Quality Education Look Like?

\* Available in Spanish

**Sample topic frames:** To give you a sense of what topic frames look like, here are some examples.

## **1. TOPIC: Purposes of Education**

### **Introductory overview followed by presentation of priorities set by 3 different school boards.**

Schools can't be expected to do everything equally well. Effective schools must set priorities in how they allocate resources, what they look for when hiring teachers, and how they construct curriculum.

## **CHOICE FRAMEWORK**

### **School Board A: Prepare students for success in the job market**

Toward this end, the district emphasizes the academic basics, computer literacy, applying course work to real-world situations and good work habits. Rigorous technical training is offered to those students who are not likely to go on to college. Job fairs, job internships, and career counseling are a significant part of the curriculum for all students

### **School Board B: Widen students' horizons and help them develop a love of learning**

Toward this end, the district emphasizes following academic basics with in-depth studies in literature, science, math, history, and the arts. Students are also helped to find and pursue those areas of learning in which they have special interests and gifts. A high value is placed on creativity, independent thinking and effectively expressing ideas

### **School Board C: Educate students to be responsible and capable citizens**

In addition to teaching the academic basics, the district places special emphasis on course work that helps students appreciate both cultural differences *and* the common history and values that all Americans share. Civics classes stress the importance of voting and citizenship. Finally, the district encourages all students to do some form of voluntary community service during their school careers.

## **2. TOPIC: Parental Involvement**

**Introductory overview followed by presentation of 3 elementary schools with differing levels of parental involvement.**

### **CHOICE FRAMEWORK**

**Elementary School A:** Parents help run the school by serving on a school management council with teachers and the principal. The council decides on hiring, expenditures, curriculum and textbooks and materials. Parents are elected to the council by other parents and have as many votes on the council as the professional educators.

**Elementary School B:** Parents are asked to support their children's education at home in close cooperation with the school. Parents are expected to limit television, check homework regularly, make sure their children have the space and quiet needed to study, and set high expectations. Parents are asked to support discipline and grading policies.

**Elementary School C:** Parents are encouraged to come into the school and to help with school activities but with so many broken homes, social problems and people working extra jobs, the school cannot count on parents' involvement and must take on many of the roles once filled by parents. This might include serving breakfast and lunch, getting teachers more involved in the home life of their students, mentor programs bringing in adult role models, and social workers helping kids in need.

### **3. TOPIC: School Safety**

**Opening question for discussion followed by presentation of 3 community approaches.**

**Opening question:** How serious is the issue of school safety in your local schools, and do you consider it a crisis, or a problem?

#### **CHOICE FRAMEWORK:**

**Community A is teaching students to resolve conflicts peacefully and providing social services to those in need**

Children need to be taught that it's possible to resolve conflict without resorting to violence. And for those children who are troubled and need extra help, the schools should be providing first-rate guidance services to detect and counsel such children and their families.

**Community B is setting behavioral standards with clear consequences and holding student and their parents accountable**

A zero-tolerance policy should be employed that removes violent kids or those caught with weapons or drugs. Parents and the community can help by supporting the school's policy. In addition, parents should be held accountable for the behavior of their children.

**Community C is enhancing school security, and reinforcing this in the community**

Having a zero-tolerance policy, teaching conflict resolution, and offering social services distract educators from their central mission. Educators should focus on teaching, not policing. Violent students are committing crimes that the police or private security forces are equipped and trained to handle. Metal detectors and security professionals will best deter and control school safety and permit educators to focus on their jobs.

#### **4. TOPIC: Helping All Students Succeed in a Diverse Society**

**Opening questions for discussion followed by presentation of 3 schools' approaches.**

**Opening questions:** How well are students doing in school in our community? Are some doing better than others? Who's succeeding, who's not—and why?

#### **CHOICE FRAMEWORK**

##### **School A is focusing on raising expectations**

- This school is demanding excellence of all students, with new academic standards that all students will need to meet if they are to move ahead.
- It looks to hire teachers with high academic expectations for all students and trains them in the new standards.
- Finally, all students are tested regularly to determine how well they are doing, and to determine how well the teachers and the school are doing.

##### **School B is focusing on increasing parental and community involvement**

- This school concentrates on making sure all parents have the information they need about their child's education.
- It also works to make the school more welcoming and convenient for all kinds of parents and guardians, as well as other community members.
- Finally, it provides counseling, social services and mentoring for students with social problems that distract them from learning.

##### **School C is focusing on ensuring a safe and respectful learning environment**

- It has a zero-tolerance policy that removes violent kids or those caught with weapons or drugs.
- It is investing in programs to teach kids to resolve their conflicts peacefully.
- And, it is promoting tolerance, understanding and respect across racial and ethnic lines.

## **5. TOPIC: Neighborhood Schools and Diversity**

**Introductory overview followed by presentation of 3 community approaches.**

### **CHOICE FRAMEWORK**

#### **Community A: Focus on Academics and Not Diversity**

This community believes that schools should concentrate on academics, and views focusing on diversity as a distraction. It believes:

- students can learn just as well in a diverse class or with others that share their background.
- any school can succeed, including those whose students are largely lower income or minority
- it's wrong to use the lack of diversity as an excuse for poor student performance
- Therefore, community A is focusing on creating smaller classes, hiring better teachers and raising academic expectations.

#### **Community B: Pursue Diversity through School Policies**

This community feels integration and diversity are too important to ignore, and is pursuing both academically successful and socially diverse schools.

- Community B is creating integrated magnet and charter schools, linking students from different schools through the Internet, field trips and class projects, and recruiting teachers from diverse backgrounds.
- It may also spread students around the district to make sure schools have children of different backgrounds.
- Its schools' policies aim to maintain diversity where it currently exists and increase diversity where it does not.

#### **Community C: Pursue Integration and Diversity in the Community, not Through the Schools**

This community views segregated schools as a societal problem not a school issue. Segregation begins with adults, not with children. Encouraging diversity in the broader community addresses the problem at its roots, and leaves schools free to focus on academics. Community C is:

- Working with religious and civic organizations to bring together different groups to ease the fears and misunderstandings that cause segregated neighborhoods in the first place.
- Creating housing policies that encourage integrated neighborhoods, such as developing poorer sections of town to attract middle-class homeowners and offering incentives to create low-cost housing in middle-class neighborhoods.

## **6. TOPIC: Child Care**

**Introductory overview followed by presentation by 3 different approaches.**

### **CHOICE FRAMEWORK**

#### **Approach A: Help parents take care of their own children**

This approach is based on the belief that one parent staying at home is best for young children, and aims to make it easier for parents to do so. To help families, this approach:

- Encourages legislators to provide tax breaks to parents of young children to help them better afford to keep one parent at home.
- Encourages employers to provide several months of paid leave to new parents and offer flexible work schedules so parents can work from home or reduce hours.
- Provides moral encouragement and support for families that choose to keep one parent home.

#### **Approach B: Provide quality, affordable childcare for those who need the most help**

Staying at home with young children is not a realistic option for single and low-income parents. This approach focuses resources on expanding existing programs and developing new ones for those with the greatest need. This approach would:

- Improve and subsidize top-notch day care in low-income neighborhoods.
- Provide tax breaks to parents to help them afford professional childcare.
- Increase funding for state and Head Start programs and expand after-school programs for lower income families.

#### **Approach C: Provide comprehensive, quality childcare for all families**

All families should have access to quality professional childcare, not just lower income or single parent families. The best way to do this is to create a comprehensive system that serves the whole community. This approach would:

- Create pre-school and after-school childcare programs, such as child care cooperatives, which would be open to every family, regardless of income.
- Encourage schools, employers, childcare professionals and families to work together to make sure all of the community's childcare needs are met.



## **7. TOPIC: Creating a Formula for Success in Low Performing Schools**

A general discussion of the following questions sets the context choice work.

Preparatory discussions:

- How well are the schools doing in our community?
- How do you define a low-performing school?
- What do you think are some of the most important differences between successful schools and failing schools? What makes the difference?

### **CHOICE FRAMEWORK**

#### **School Community A: Set High Expectations and Hold Schools Accountable**

This school community is raising expectations for student achievement and holding teachers, students, and parents accountable. This approach could involve:

- Setting high academic standards and helping everyone meet them
- Testing students regularly to measure progress and pinpoint where improvements are needed, even if it might mean some students won't graduate if they fail to meet the standards
- Rewarding schools with bonuses when student achievement improves, and sanctioning schools that don't improve with consequences like state takeovers and reorganization.

Those who like this approach often say:

“If you demand more, people will rise to the challenge.”

#### **School Community B: Increase Resources for Classroom Essentials**

This school community needs resources for smaller classes, training and retaining teachers, keeping textbooks and technology current, and supporting struggling students with extra help after school and in the summer. To do this could involve:

- Pressuring officials to spend more on education, even if it means raising taxes or cutting other services, such as transportation or parks
- Raising money through donations, foundation grants, and partnerships with local businesses
- Reviewing the current budget to make sure there is minimal waste and that existing resources are being spent on the right things.

Those who like this approach often say:

“Schools can only succeed if they have the resources to get the job done.”

### **School Community C: Increase Parent and Community Involvement**

This school community is requiring parents and the whole community to get more involved in making sure students succeed. This approach could involve:

- Communicating with parents on a daily or weekly basis and making it easier to do so, with classroom phones, Web sites, and email
- Getting parents and community members involved in making decisions at the school and district levels about how money is spent, curriculum developed, and discipline enforced.
- Requiring parents to sign an agreement promising to check homework nightly, attend school meetings, and get training so they can help their children learn, even if it may be a heavy burden to overstressed parents.

Those who like this approach often say:

“The schools can’t do it alone. Parents and community members must give more time and effort if students are to succeed.”

### **School Community D: Ensure Effective Leadership**

This community is focusing on strong, effective, and qualified leadership. It is therefore giving school leaders the freedom and authority they need to make changes in the school and motivate the students and staff. This approach could involve:

- Giving school leaders more authority over their budget, curriculum, and staff assignments, and making sure they’re not hindered by bureaucratic obstacles
- Recruiting and retaining qualified leaders and staff
- Building trust among school staff and communicating a vision of teaching and learning, but recognizing the danger that reform may not outlast the leader.

Those who like this approach often say,

“Change requires strong leaders who serve as role models and have the flexibility and authority to make their vision a reality.”

## **8. TOPIC: School Readiness and Early Elementary School Success**

A PowerPoint presentation may be customized to include data and local reference information. Introductory overview provides background concepts and statistics, followed by presentation by 3 different approaches.

### **CHOICE FRAMEWORK**

#### **Approach A: Provide Universal Access to Pre-school for All Children**

All children should have the opportunity to attend a high-quality pre-school in order to develop a strong set of skills for school. Considerations in this approach include:

- Public pre-school: For some, access for all means we should guarantee access to publicly provided pre-school.
- Mandatory pre-school: For some, access for all means that all children would be required to attend pre-school.
- A Pre-school System: Access for all might be a system of public and private providers that offer a variety of pre-school choices for families.

Universal access approach might include public system to ensure high quality, such as licensing and certifications for programs and staff.

#### **Approach B: Improve the Network of Services for Families of Pre-school Children**

Children's early education needs can best be met through a network of services, resources, and information that provide families support before their children come to elementary school. The network of services might include:

- Support services for families that assess child development and train parents to foster their child's learning
- Community resources to promote early education, such as museums, family resource centers, and libraries
- Strengthening linkages between pre-schools and elementary schools

#### **Approach C: Provide Strong Support to Children in Elementary School**

A child's learning and educational preparation can best be addressed when each child comes to school. Children should be assessed and services provided at that time to help all children succeed. Strategies might include:

- In-school tutoring and support services
- Training in alternative teaching methods so that teachers are better prepared to help all children learn
- Training parents and other community members to supplement the teachers' work in the classroom and help children

## **SAMPLE CONVERSATION AGENDAS**

# SAMPLE AGENDA FOR AN EVENING COMMUNITY CONVERSATION

|      |   |   |
|------|---|---|
| 5:30 | <b>Registration and Light Supper</b>  | 30-45 minutes                           |
| 6:00 | <b>Introduction</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welcome(s). Explanation of process</li> <li>• If you are using a PowerPoint, show it at this time</li> <li>• Introduce moderators and recorders who lead the small groups to the breakout rooms. Colored folders match room assignments</li> <li>• One person stays at registration table to assign latecomers to groups and provide directions</li> </ul>   | 15 minutes<br>8-10 minutes<br>5 minutes |
| 6:30 | <b>Small Group Discussion</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Go around circle and introduce by role (not job)</li> <li>• Highlight posted ground rules/guidelines and agenda</li> <li>• If using a video show it now</li> <li>• Begin discussion by asking for show of hands for each choice; recorder begins now by recording number of votes for each choice</li> <li>• Choose a “non-expert” who voted for choice A and begin discussion</li> </ul><br><b>Discussion Summary</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Points of Agreement</li> <li>• Points of Disagreement</li> <li>• Questions and Concerns</li> <li>• Next Steps</li> </ul> | 1hr. 45 min.                            |
| 8:15 | <b>Return to Big Room</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask that survey in colored folder be filled out</li> <li>• Each group reports on its conversation</li> <li>• Ask that no one repeat what has already been said; first report is the longest and last is the shortest</li> </ul>  | 30 minutes                              |
| 9:00 | <b>Wrap-up</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Announce date, place, and time of follow up meeting</li> <li>• Thank planning committee</li> </ul>  |   |

# SAMPLE AGENDA FOR A SATURDAY MORNING COMMUNITY CONVERSATION

|              |  |  |
|--------------|--|--|
| <b>8:30</b>  | <b>Registration and Continental Breakfast</b>  | 30-45 minutes  |
| <b>9:00</b>  | <b>Introduction</b>  |  |
|              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welcome(s). Explanation of process</li> <li>• If you are using a PowerPoint show it at this time</li> <li>• Introduce moderators and recorders who lead the small groups to the breakout rooms. Colored folders match room assignments</li> <li>• One person stays at registration table to assign latecomers to groups and provide directions</li> </ul>                                 | <p>15 minutes</p> <p>8-10 minutes</p> <p>5 minutes</p> |
| <b>9:30</b>  | <b>Small Group Discussion</b>  | 1 hr. 45 min.  |
|              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Go around circle and introduce by role (not job)</li> <li>• Highlight posted ground rules/guidelines and agenda</li> <li>• If using a video show it now</li> <li>• Begin discussion by asking for show of hands for each choice; recorder begins now by recording number of votes for each choice</li> <li>• Choose a “non-expert” who voted for choice A and begin discussion</li> </ul> |  |
|              | <b>Discussion Summary</b>  |  |
|              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Points of Agreement</li> <li>• Points of Disagreement</li> <li>• Questions and Concerns</li> <li>• Next Steps</li> </ul>  |  |
| <b>11:15</b> | <b>Return to Big Room</b>  |  |
|              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask that survey in colored folder be filled out</li> <li>• Each group reports on its conversation</li> <li>• Ask that no one repeat what has already been said; so that first report is the longest and last is the shortest</li> </ul>   | 30 minutes   |
| <b>12:00</b> | <b>Wrap-up</b>   |  |
|              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Announce date, place and time of follow up meeting</li> <li>• Wrap up, thank planning committee</li> </ul>  |  |

## **PLANNING COMMITTEE TASKS**

## PLANNING COMMITTEE TASKS

### CHECK LIST

Note: This list will help you get started but you may want to include other activities as part of your Community Conversation. You will need between six weeks and three months to plan your event. You may meet together as a committee of the whole or create sub-committees to handle the arrangements.

- € **Determine the topic.** You may reach consensus or hold a vote. If you choose a topic that does not come with accompanying video and printed materials you will need to create a PowerPoint and Participant Guide. We can help you.
- € **Pick a date** that does not conflict with any major community activities.
- € **Choose a safe, well lit site** with parking. Many Planning Committees have used public schools but other suitable venues include libraries, universities, private schools and community centers. You will need a large room for your meal, such as a school cafeteria. You will also need at least five breakout rooms for the small discussion groups. And you will need a safe place for child care.
- € **Select moderators and recorders** whom we will train. Training takes about 4 hours. We try to offer trainings regionally, and participants may be asked to travel modest distances.
- € **Arrange for child care.**
- € **Select a caterer** or other way to feed 100 participants.
- € **Arrange for transportation** for those who need it.
- € **Engage interpreters**, if necessary.
- € **Create an invitation list.** Ask each Planner to submit names from their own constituencies which should bring together a diverse group of 100 participants.
- € **Design an invitation** with a tear off for the RSVP and request for special requirements such as translators, child care, wheelchair ramp, etc.
- € **Arrange for printing, mailing, and a central site to gather RSVPs.** After the RSVPs have been returned, follow up with **reminder phone calls.**
- € **Create diverse small discussion groups** for 15-20 participants.



- € **Invite media** and consider how to involve them.
- € **Collect brochures and other materials**, e.g., bookmarks, calendars to fill participant folders. Compile lists of local and State government officials with contact information in order that participants may easily inform their representatives of their opinions on educational matters.
- € **Print 100 copies of the participant guide and the survey**; put into folders.
- € Using the Recorders' notes, **compile a report** of the event to send to participants, local government officials, school administrators and school boards, media, etc.
- € **Choose a date, place, and time for your follow up meeting** where you create action teams to follow up on the ideas generated during the Conversation.

## **Choosing a Date**

Someone on the planning committee should be responsible for checking local calendars of events to avoid conflicts. The Committee will decide whether to hold the Conversation on a weekday night or a Saturday morning or other time. There is no “right” answer, no perfect time. Different people will be able to come at different times. The best time is what works for your community.

## **Determining a Topic and General Goals**

Choosing a topic can be a quick process or a complicated and lengthy one. We suggest not picking the school budget, but beginning with a broader topic such as Purposes of Education, and then the financing discussion can follow. Pick a topic of broad interest to the public and policymakers. Often some of the issues raised during a Community Conversation are incorporated in school district strategic planning.

While the planning committee should determine some general goals for the Conversation to communicate purpose and to ground the conversation locally, it is important not to appear to have a “hidden agenda” or predetermined outcomes.

## **Selecting Moderators**

Skilled moderators are key to making the Conversation a success, determining in large part the quality of the experience. Moderators should be comfortable speaking to diverse groups of strangers. They should be comfortable and able to manage the participants’ conflicting positions and ideas. They must be neutral and impartial, not associated with a particular viewpoint. It is advisable to have Moderators and Recorders who reflect the demographics of the community. It is important to have some diversity of race, ethnicity, gender, political affiliation, etc., among the moderators.

We prefer training novice moderators so that we can leave behind a group of newly skilled moderators to lead other public meetings, e.g. a town budget hearing.

## **Selecting Recorders**

Each small group needs a Recorder to work along with the moderator. The Recorder’s notes are the only record of the small groups’ discussions. Recorders are expected to attend a training workshop. They should be reasonable spellers with clear handwriting.

## **Recruiting Participants**

Choose participants for your Conversation in order to ensure diversity. You want a cross-section of the community. You may decide to also announce the event in the press and ask that interested residents telephone members of the Planning Committee for information. Walk-ins are generally few in number and can be accommodated at the last minute. Tab 9 contains a recruitment grid to help you craft your invitation list.

Some groups will need to be “over-recruited” in order to have a representative number. These could include people without their own transportation or English language learners. High school students are invaluable participants in these discussions but with school assignments, sports, and after school jobs, they may be difficult to attract. Sometimes teachers assign work relating to the Conversation topic. Remember you want a mix of old timers and newcomers to see some new faces and hear new voices.

### **Observers**

The Planning Committee decides if there will be Observers. If Observers are included, they are typically members of the Board of Education or school administrators, local and State government officials. Observers do not participate. They quietly sit behind the conversation circle. It may be helpful to have buttons that say “Observer” to distribute to your observers. Invitations should make clear that these guests are invited to listen. Each observer should be briefed about the importance of not speaking from outside the discussion.

### **English Language Learners**

Some Connecticut communities have significant populations of immigrants. While Spanish is the most common second language in the state, some municipalities have numerous speakers of Haitian Creole, Albanian, Serbo-Croatian, Asian languages, etc. This can be addressed in a number of ways.

Some Community Conversations have made one small group discussion all-Spanish, for example, using a Spanish speaking moderator and recorder. Others have made the entire event bilingual. And still others have included interpreters quietly translating for participants who needed assistance. This is a Planning Committee decision.

### **Conversation Report**

The Recorders’ notes should be bundled and given to members of the Planning Committee. In addition, the surveys should be collected. These are the two sources of information for the report. The report should go to participants, the media, Board of Education and school administrators, state and local government officials.

### **Follow up Meeting**

A few weeks after the Community Conversation, hold your follow-up meeting. The information contained in the report can be used to begin the discussion about next steps. Typically Action Teams are formed to work on specific issues that arose during the Conversation. An example might be a working group committed to improving communication between the school district and the community.

## **PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

## **PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Several practical items require attention and last minute review. While some of these considerations have been touched on in other sections of this guide, this section adds detail to those recommendations.

### **Food**

A continental breakfast or light supper is usually served. It is best to keep the food arrangements simple and to consider a vegetarian option. In addition to the welcoming meal, some communities provide snacks in discussion rooms. This is a nice extra where possible. Conversations held in the morning should offer hot and cold beverages for the wrap-up session. Conversations planned for the evening may reserve dessert and coffee for the wrap-up session.

### **Choosing a location**

Finding a neutral site is important to support objectives of the Conversation. A school may be used unless there are major community controversies about the particular school, or about the schools in general. Successful conversations have been held in community centers, community colleges, churches, corporate facilities, and public libraries. Sites should be well known and easily accessible.

The Conversation site must have a large meeting room where all participants can assemble for the introduction and wrap-up sessions. Rooms for the small group discussions must accommodate seating, arranged in a semi-circle, for 20 adults and the moderator and recorder. The large meeting room may also be used as one of the breakout rooms. For the small group discussions, you will need convenient wall space to post the flip-chart sheets as the conversation develops. Windows or crowded bulletin boards are not suitable. If you are planning to use an elementary or pre-school setting, be sure to set up discussion rooms with adult-sized chairs for the Conversation.

Parking facilities should easily accommodate the number of participants and should be clearly marked and well lighted for evening events. Post signs to direct participants to the most convenient entry.

### **Equipment, supplies, and technology**

In the large meeting room, you will need a microphone and amplifier for the plenary sessions to open and close the conversation. If a video will be shown, each small discussion room should have a TV/VCR or DVD set up and a copy of the conversation topic video. Each room should have a full flip-chart pad on a stand and a supply of markers. Although they are expensive, flip-chart-sized Post-It pads are recommended. Otherwise, use painter's masking tape that will not damage walls when the recorder posts the conversation notes.

Those using the PowerPoint conversation starters need a computer and projector to show the presentation. This is best done in the large setting. Details should be worked out with the planning committee.

### **Signs**

Distinct signs to direct participants to the meeting and discussion rooms will make the transitions between sessions go smoothly and quickly. Conversation signs should be easily distinguished from other signs in the facility. Prepare signs showing the large meeting room, small discussion rooms by group number/color, giving directions to restroom facilities and to and from parking. Some communities posted large outdoor signs at the parking lot entrance and at nearby intersections. Be aware of any specific challenges posed by the facility and prepare signs to assist your participants.

### **Registration**

A registration table should be set up where participants enter. If the registration area is at a distance from the building entrance, post signs to show the way. At registration, participants should be given a name tag, a Conversation packet including the Participant Guide and other informative materials. (Many communities have found it helpful to code small groups by colored folders, then to position a music stand with the appropriate colored folder outside the room.) A subcommittee should prepare the discussion group assignments in advance. Participants should be given their small group assignment when they register. Gather participants' name, address, email address, and phone number on sign-in sheets. Make sure that there are enthusiastic people at the registration table who are able to answer basic questions about the Community Conversation. The planning committee will decide how to handle walk-ins. Those handling registrations should have clear instructions on that plan. Walk-ins can be randomly assigned across groups or assigned to a group or groups with smaller numbers of participants.

### **Recording the Conversation**

During the small group discussion, a trained recorder will take detailed notes to document the discussion, including major points of agreement and disagreement, and participants' ideas for next steps.

Some communities consider making video recordings of the conversation. If the equipment and trained operators are readily available, this may be a useful option. A video can be used in follow-up activities to build awareness of the issue and the process of community dialogue. Some participants may be reluctant to speak freely in a group that is being taped. These participants should have the option to join a group that will not be taped.

## **Equipment Checklist**

Very little special equipment is needed. The checklist below will help you plan for the meeting.

### **REGISTRATION**

- € Long table and chairs for staff
- € Name tags for participants, and pens or pencils
- € Participant Guides
- € Other

**CENTRAL DISCUSSION ROOM** (may also be used for one of the small group discussions)

- € Podium and microphone
- € A table and chair for people involved in opening and closing activities
- € TV monitor(s) and, if a video is being used, a DVD player
- € Flip-charts, markers, masking tape
- € Chairs that can be moved into a circle, if this room is also to be used as a discussion room
- € Tables, if room is used for serving food
- € Other

### **BREAKOUT ROOMS**

- € TV monitor and VCR/DVD, if a video is being used
- € Flip-chart, markers, masking tape
- € Moveable chairs set up in a circle or semi-circle
- € Other

### **REFRESHMENTS**

- € A light meal should be served, along with beverages and snacks for the break. Let people know in the invitation that food will be available. A continental breakfast is adequate for a Saturday morning, if the meeting will conclude by 12:30 p.m. Some communities have provided lunch as well.

## **THINKING ABOUT NEXT STEPS**



## **THINKING ABOUT NEXT STEPS**

In our experience, almost everyone who attends a well-organized, well-run community conversation comes away feeling the experience was different, refreshing, and valuable. Most also feel “there was not enough time” and that even more people ought to be involved in such discussions. One goal of the Community Conversation work is to build local capacity and momentum so that more inclusive and higher quality dialogue can become institutionalized in communities.

How can you best build on your Conversation to engage your community more fully in education? This section is intended to aid in preparing an initial follow-up meeting and thinking further about this question.

### **The Follow-up Meeting**

In the closing plenary session participants frequently ask, “What happens next?” They want to be sure that their input will make a difference. The goals of the follow-up meeting are:

- to provide participants with a summary report of the conversation event.
- to respond to specific questions and concerns raised at the conversation to the extent possible.
- to plan work on action ideas suggested during in the conversation.
- to offer opportunities for people to work on new initiatives.
- to identify ways to continue community involvement in education issues.

In some follow-up forums, policymakers are asked to respond to what they heard participants saying during the conversation. Use the sample agenda as a guide in setting up your follow-up session.

### **Holding a Second Community Conversation**

More conversations are a natural way in which to follow up. Planning committees face a series of related questions.

*What should the second conversation be about?*

You might hold a second session to go deeper into the same issue to allow people to:

- Get more specific about common ground and ideas for action.
- Work through important areas of disagreement that were identified.
- Reconsider some facet of the conversation once missing information is obtained.

You might tackle a new topic, perhaps one that the participants identified as important. Observations, notes from break out discussions, and data from participant surveys will provide topic suggestions. New topics can be recommended in the follow-up session. It is important to select a topic about which people feel a sense of urgency and where there are significant community issues to work out.

In addition to identifying the topic, Planners face the same questions and challenges encountered with organizing the first community conversation.

- Who is going to organize the event? Is the original planning committee intact? Are there others who should be involved?
- Where should a second event be held? Were the space and location adequate? How would changing location affect participation?
- Do you have the moderators needed for a second conversation? How will they prepare for a new topic? Do you need, or want, to train new people?
- What were the weaknesses last time and how can you address them? What can you do to be more successful?

There are no mutually exclusive next steps. For example you might hold a first conversation for others while providing an opportunity for initial participants to continue their dialogue. You may want to experiment with the initial formula by varying the number of participants or holding a number of conversations as a series. It is important to maintain the fundamental principles:

- ❖ Striving for a broad, diverse group of participants;
- ❖ Working in small moderated groups;
- ❖ Providing structure and non-partisan, jargon-free, choice based materials; and
- ❖ Maintaining an open, inclusive sponsorship and atmosphere.

### **Complementary Follow-up Activities**

In addition to future community conversations, there are many other ways in which you can build on your community's initial conversation experience. There is no single right way to do this. The question is - what would be a good approach for you, your group and your community?

- Support the school district or a community-based organization in distributing information that people at the first conversation said they needed.
- Help the school system to respond to widely expressed policy concerns.
- Continue or expand the dialogue through the media – local newspaper, school community newsletter, on the Internet.
- Convene a leadership session and ask them to react to some of the results of the deliberations at the session.
- Hold focus groups to understand better some of the areas of disagreement.
- Establish study circles to continue the small group engagement on the topic.

### Examples From Past Community Conversation Sites

To give you some ideas about activities that you might want to pursue to build on your community conversation, here are some examples of how such activities have evolved in some Connecticut sites and other communities across the country.

- **Bridgeport, CT:** To expand the conversations, the planning committee decided to work directly with school sites, beginning with ten schools where parents and staff organized conversations. This effort has expanded to include over 16 schools in the Bridgeport system and continues to grow. The school system is extremely supportive of the initiative.
- **Hartford, CT:** Following the initial community conversation, a survey was sent to participants asking for ideas about topics for additional conversations. They selected “School Choice,” one of the state’s recommendations to the board of trustees of Hartford schools. The Hartford Parent Network and the Federation of Teachers sponsored the follow-up forum on School Choice.
- **Milford, CT:** A graduation policy reform meeting was held as a direct follow-up to the conversation. This led to a new policy that was passed by the school board. A newsletter from the school system was implemented to communicate more about academic standards. The discussion of behavioral standards in the community conversation raised the issue of respect among individuals and groups in schools and the community. A conversation on this theme was held. Community groups continue to spearhead these conversations.
- **Naugatuck Valley, CT:** The planning committee continued to meet to move forward participants’ priorities – to increase parent and community involvement; improve school-community communications; and review successful programs among Valley communities to share information. A teachers’ mini-grant program was established and continues to grow after 5 years.
- **Stonington, CT:** A community organization, Parents for Great Day Care, organized a community conversation on early learning and childcare as a means of raising awareness of the absence of childcare in the community. As an immediate outcome of the conversation, 3 providers committed to offering childcare and after only 5 months, Stonington is rapidly meeting their target of 100 new childcare slots.
- **Beacon Falls, CT:** The High School principal and a committee of parents and community members are establishing programs to address questions raised in the conversation on the topic of “Helping All Students Succeed in a Diverse Society.” A mini-grant program is being established to support student, teacher or community efforts to further these goals.

For additional follow-up support, please see TAB 11: Internet Resources. Public Agenda, National Issues Forum, and Study Circles are likely to offer most support.

# Follow-Up Meeting Sample Agenda I

Community Conversation About Education

(Conversation Topic)

- I. **Welcome** 15 minutes
  - Introduction
  - Presentation of Conversation Report
    - Summary of Findings – small group discussion notes
    - Participant survey analysis
  
- II. **Plan for the Session** 15 minutes
  - Continuing the efforts – putting the ideas to work
  - Prioritizing issues
  - Small group work teams to develop action plans incorporating ideas from the Conversation
  
- III. **Focusing Our Issues** 15 – 30 minutes
  - Review of major themes from Conversation report
    - Identify 4-6 common themes gleaned from Conversation small group reports
    - Flip chart pages list themes/ issues and significant points or ideas from the Conversation
  - Discuss aspects of each of the major themes – Q&A (Participants select 2-3 priority themes/issues)
  
- IV. **Developing Action Plans** 45 minutes  
(small working groups)
  - Participants break into small groups to develop action plans
  
- V. **Reporting – Review of Action Plans** 20 minutes
  - Small groups report back their plans – incorporate feedback from the larger group
  
- VI. **Next Steps**
  - Task Force sign up
  - Next meetings

# Follow-Up Meeting Sample Agenda II

Community Conversation About Education

(Conversation Topic)

Registration and continental breakfast/light refreshments

- I. **Introductions and Session Overview** 15-30 minutes
- Welcome and Opening presentation
    - Short video or speaker to set the stage for session
  - Our Purpose this morning/evening
    - Prioritize issues
    - Form teams and begin action planning
- II. **Focusing Our Issues** 30 minutes
- Community Conversation Summary Report
  - Review Key Themes and Next Steps
  - Setting Priorities  
(plan a process to form group consensus on 2-3 top priorities)
- III. **Moving to Action** 60 minutes
- Form small action planning groups
    - Identify a meaningful, measurable goal
    - Develop an initial strategy and the first steps of an action plan to reach that goal
    - Set a follow-up date
- IV. **Reconvene and Wrap Up** 15-30 minutes
- Small group reports
  - Commitments to action
  - Next steps/Next meeting

**COMMUNITY CONVERSATION SITE REPORT FORM**

PLEASE SUBMIT NO LATER THAN TWO WEEKS FOLLOWING CONVERSATION

**COMMUNITY CONVERSATION SITE REPORT FORM**

**Town:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Conversation date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Topic:** \_\_\_\_\_ **# Attendees:** \_\_\_\_\_ **# Small Groups** \_\_\_\_\_

**Conversation location:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Did the location work well for your Conversation? Why/why not?**

**What approaches worked well to attract participants? What barriers were encountered?**

**How well did your participants represent the diverse segments of your community? Please give examples to describe the diverse participation.**

**What were the three (3) best things that happened at your Conversation?**

**What were the three (3) most difficult things about your Conversation?**

**What action steps evolved out of your Conversation?**

**Please list purchases for the conversation and the amounts spent.**

**Please list all in-kind donations and resources.  
If there are funds remaining, please tell us your plans to use the money.**

**What else would you like to tell us about your Conversation?**

**How can we improve the planning/organization for Conversations?**

**When is your follow-up meeting?**

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Time:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Location:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Planning Committee members:**

| <b>Name</b> | <b>Affiliation</b> | <b>Phone#</b> | <b>Fax#</b> |
|-------------|--------------------|---------------|-------------|
| _____       | _____              | _____         | _____       |
| _____       | _____              | _____         | _____       |
| _____       | _____              | _____         | _____       |
| _____       | _____              | _____         | _____       |
| _____       | _____              | _____         | _____       |
| _____       | _____              | _____         | _____       |
| _____       | _____              | _____         | _____       |

Please attach an extra sheet if needed.

**Moderators:**

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**Recorders:**

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## **Community Conversation – Small Group Discussion Summary**

Please use the following questions to summarize notes from the small group discussions. Identify common themes and ideas that came out in more than one group and capture important unique ideas. You can use this information for follow-up sessions and include in your site report.

**PARTICIPATION: Please describe how small groups were set up and any special considerations taken in organizing the discussion groups.** (Examples of “special considerations”: ensuring that home-schooling families were represented in every discussion group, or offering an option for participants with limited English proficiency to choose native language discussion group.)

**ISSUES: What major themes emerged across the small discussion groups?**

**QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS: What questions did participants raise? What information does the community need to know? Did some participants have information in response to other participants’ questions? What kinds of information did participants share?**

**IDEAS AND ACTION STEPS: What specific suggestions were given? What next steps are participants willing to support? What commitments are participants willing to make to help implement changes?**

**FINAL SUMMARY: What did you learn about improving schools and meeting the needs of children and families?**

**Please send this completed report no later than two weeks after your Conversation to:** Mary Broderick, 84 Webster Road, East Lyme, CT 06333-1632. Reports may be submitted by e-mail to [mary-broderick@att.net](mailto:mary-broderick@att.net). Questions may be directed to Mary (860) 739-7866 or Nancy Polk (203) 397-2799.

## **SAMPLE INVITATIONS**

## **INSERT SAMPLE INVITATIONS**

**SAMPLE COMMUNITY RECRUITMENT GRID**

## **INSERT SAMPLE RECRUITMENT GRID**

## **SAMPLE PARTICIPANT SURVEY**

## COMMUNITY CONVERSATION PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is the final step in our community conversation. It will provide valuable feedback on how to have more successful conversations and ideas about follow-up to this meeting. Your responses will remain anonymous. Before beginning, please write the name of your small discussion group. **Please hand in the questionnaire and the last page – contact sheets – separately as you leave.** Thank you very much for your participation in this community conversation and for completing this questionnaire.

Name of your small discussion group: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Of the following, which is the most important way to follow-up on this conversation?  
Have more conversations about this issue to involve more people in the community.  
Go further into the issue we discussed.  
Tackle another issue or issues. (What issue? \_\_\_\_\_)  
Do something else. (What? \_\_\_\_\_)
2. In what way(s) might you, the schools, and/or the community be involved in follow-up to this meeting?
3. Are there other education issues that are of particular importance to discuss in your community? If so, please indicate which one(s).
4. Are there any individuals or organizations that you wish had been invited to this meeting or that you suggest be invited to future meetings? If so, please indicate below:
5. There were people of different backgrounds and occupations participating in the meeting. Do you think this made the meeting  
More useful  
Less useful  
Made no difference  
Not sure
6. The first part of the discussion involved choices between different approaches to or positions on issues. Overall, how helpful were these choices to the discussion?  
Very helpful  
Somewhat helpful  
Not very helpful  
Not sure

Why do you feel that way?

7. How helpful were the moderators?

Very helpful

Somewhat helpful

Not very helpful

Not helpful at all

Not sure

Why do you feel that way?

**Overall, how helpful were the following?**

8. Community Conversation Participant Guide

Very helpful

Somewhat helpful

Not very helpful

Not sure

Haven't looked at it yet

If you have answered somewhat or not very helpful or not sure, what would make the Guide more useful?

9. Discussion Starter (video/ PowerPoint, etc.)

Very helpful

Somewhat helpful

Not very helpful

Not sure

Please comment briefly on your answer:

10. What did you like most about this meeting?

11. What did you like least?

12. How would you improve the meeting?

13. Are you the parent of school-age children?



No  
Yes

## COMMUNITY CONVERSATION CONTACT INFORMATION

**Please tear this page off from your questionnaire and hand it in separately.**  
(This will ensure that your survey answers remain confidential, while also ensuring that you can receive further information.)

1. Would you like your name, address, and telephone number to be distributed to all today's participants? (The purpose of such a contact list is to make it easier for participants to keep each other informed about activities in which each is involved pertaining to the public schools.)

€ Yes

€ No

2. Would you like to receive the overall results of this survey and be informed of any activities that are scheduled as a follow-up to today's meeting?

€ Yes

€ No

3. Would you like to be involved in helping plan and carry out any follow-up activities?

€ Yes

€ No

Name:

Mailing Address:

Telephone:

Email:

## **INTERNET RESOURCES**

## INTERNET RESOURCES

Organizations and institutions listed provide information and publications that may be useful in planning follow-up activities and responding to questions raised during your Community Conversation.

### CONNECTICUT RESOURCES

- Connecticut Assets Network [www.ctassets.org](http://www.ctassets.org)  
CAN promotes the use of asset-based strategies for the healthy development of youth, families, and communities.
- Connecticut Association for Human Services [www.cahs.org](http://www.cahs.org)  
A diverse statewide membership of citizens, religious leaders, labor, corporate supporters, human services, professionals, and others committed to decreasing poverty, neglect, and inequality.
- Connecticut Center for School Change [www.ctschoolchange.org](http://www.ctschoolchange.org)  
A private, nonprofit organization that supports comprehensive reform of Connecticut's school districts to help improve teaching and learning. The Center works through grants, technical assistance, workshops, seminars, research on policy issues, and partnerships with other organizations committed to systemic change.
- Connecticut Commission on Children [www.cga.ct.gov/coc/](http://www.cga.ct.gov/coc/)  
Created by the State of Connecticut, this bipartisan commission works to oversee matters concerning children and youth, providing links and information to identify and promote public policy initiatives and coordinated efforts.
- Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance <http://www.earlychildhoodalliance.com/>  
A growing consortium of organizations and individuals committed to improving developmental outcomes in the areas of learning, health, safety and economic security for children ages birth to eight, and their families. Recognizing the need to prioritize its current work, the Alliance is focusing on the needs of young children and their families in the context of health and learning.
- Connecticut Parent Power [www.ctparentpower.org](http://www.ctparentpower.org)  
Statewide parent action network with a [history](#) of strengthening the voices of parents on the many decisions that affect our children and families. Parents are uniting together to build local and statewide networks with the [goal](#) of providing accurate and important information on issues, training on how and when to take action, and connections with other people statewide that are ready to act to protect and benefit children.
- Connecticut State Department of Education [www.state.ct.us/sde](http://www.state.ct.us/sde)  
Site contains messages from the Commissioner, strategic school profiles by school and community, Data Acquisition plan, and other information on legislation, SDE initiatives, programs, and resources.
- Connecticut Voices for Children [www.ctkidslink.org](http://www.ctkidslink.org)  
Seeks to promote the well-being of Connecticut's young people through research, public policy analysis, communication, youth leadership, and the mobilization of citizens.

#### Everyday Democracy

[www.everyday-democracy.org](http://www.everyday-democracy.org)

Everyday Democracy (formerly the Study Circles Resource Center) is a national organization that helps local communities find ways for all kinds of people to think, talk and work together to solve problems. They work with neighborhoods, cities and towns, regions, and states, helping them pay particular attention to how racism and ethnic differences affect the problems they address.

#### School-Family-Community Partnership Project

<http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/DEPS/Family/SFCP/RevPos.pdf>

Established to strengthen and enhance relationships among schools, families, and communities that are essential to the academic success of all students. Network now includes over 75 schools and continues to grow.

### NATIONAL RESOURCES

#### Center for Social Organization of Schools

[www.csos.jhu.edu](http://www.csos.jhu.edu)

Established in 1966 as an educational research and development center at Johns Hopkins University, the Center conducts programmatic research to improve the education system, develops curricula, and provides technical assistance to help schools apply the Center's research. The Center currently includes the federally supported Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk and the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships.

#### Families and Work Institute

[www.familiesandwork.org](http://www.familiesandwork.org)

A non-profit center for research that provides data to inform decision-making on the changing workplace, changing family, and changing community.

#### Family Support America

[www.familysupportamerica.org](http://www.familysupportamerica.org)

Promotes family support as the nationally recognized movement to strengthen and support families and places the principles of family support practice at the heart of every setting in which children and families are present.

#### The National Coalition on Dialogue and Deliberation

<http://www.thataway.org/>

An organization for professionals and volunteers working in the field of civic engagement with scores of methods and information to share.

They can be reached by a Web site at: 114 W. Springville Road, Boiling Springs, PA 17007, Phone: 717-243-5144.

#### National PTA

[www.pta.org](http://www.pta.org)

The largest volunteer child advocacy organization in the country. A non-profit association of parents, educators, students, and other citizens active in their schools and communities, PTA is a leader in reminding our nation of its obligations to children.

#### National Association of Partners in Education

[www.napehq.org/1.html](http://www.napehq.org/1.html)

NAPE serves schools, businesses, community groups, educators, and individuals who work together to help students achieve.

#### National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education

[www.ncpie.org](http://www.ncpie.org)

Advocates for involvement of parents and families in their children's education and fosters relationships between home, school, and community.

National Institute on Out-of-School Time [www.niost.org](http://www.niost.org)  
Ensures that all children, youth, and families have access to high quality programs and activities during non-school hours.

National Issues Forum [www.nifi.org](http://www.nifi.org)  
Offers many topic guides. Some of their topics include:  
[Children & Family](#); [Civil Rights](#) ; [Economic Issues](#) ; [Education](#); [Energy & Environment](#); [Government & Politics](#); [Health & Well-Being](#); [International & Foreign Policy](#)

They can be reached at 1-800-433-7834, or e-mail Ginny O'Connor at [occonnor@kettering.org](mailto:occonnor@kettering.org)

National School Safety Center [www.schoolsafety.us](http://www.schoolsafety.us) Created by presidential directive in 1984 to meet need for additional training and preparation in area of school crime and violence prevention. NSSC is a non-profit whose charge is to promote safe schools and to ensure quality education for all America's children.

National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center [www.safeyouth.org](http://www.safeyouth.org)  
NYVPRC is a central source of information on prevention and intervention programs, publications, research, and statistics on violence committed by and against children and teens. Collaboration between Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other federal agencies.

Public Agenda [www.publicagenda.org](http://www.publicagenda.org)  
A non-partisan, non-profit opinion research and public engagement organization, can provide materials on a broad range of topics including:  
[Abortion](#); [America's Global Role](#); [Campaign Reform](#); [Child Care](#); [Crime](#); [The Economy](#); [Education](#); [The Environment](#); [Gay Rights](#); [Health Care](#); [Higher Education](#); [Illegal Drugs](#); [Immigration](#); [Internet Speech/Privacy](#) ; [Medicare](#); [Poverty and Welfare](#); [Race](#); [Right to Die](#); [Social Security](#)

## **RELATED READING**

## **INSERT RELATED READING**



