

**WORKING WITH
GROUPS**

VI. HOW TO WORK WITH YOUR GROUP AND HAVE GOOD MEETINGS

A. ADDRESSING PARENTS' CONCERNS

After you have recruited enough parents, it is time to have your first meeting. At that meeting, you should focus on:

- **having group members identify the issues that concern them;**
- **acquainting them with the education information and the dropout crisis;**
- **giving them information about services as well as parents' rights and obligations;**
- **introducing them to the idea of forming a club and support group at their school;**
- **developing a parent network; and**
- **determining which parents are willing to form a discussion group, at their school or elsewhere.**

B. DEFINING NEEDS AND PRIORITIES

Once you have brought together your group and have had your first get-togethers, your next few meetings should be devoted to identifying community educational needs. **WORKSHOP #4-IDENTIFYING THE NEEDS AND WANTS OF THE COMMUNITY** (included in the appendix at the back of this manual)--may be useful to get your group thinking about these issues.

After identifying your community's problems and resources with the use of this worksheet, it is a good idea to make a checklist of what your group determined they are, so you can see the needs and priorities all in one place. Here is a sample:

**EXHIBIT #5:
PROBLEMS CHECKLIST--NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

- Children cannot read, do math
- There is a high dropout rate
- Children cannot speak English or Spanish well
- The teachers are not teaching well
- The school system administration can't manage or motivate properly
- The schools here are a "dumping ground" for ineffective teachers
- There is not enough money to develop effective programs, or hire better teachers
- The system is not flexible enough to hire good teachers

Once your group has a good idea of what its problems are, it is time to set some goals. Setting goals lets the group know what they are aiming for as they start to solve some of these problems.

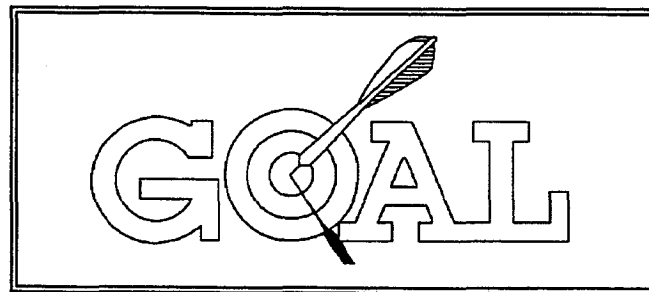


Exhibit #6 offers examples of the goals parent groups have set for themselves.

**EXHIBIT #6:
POSSIBLE GROUP GOALS**

- improve the reading and math skills of a specific number of children per year
- reduce the dropout rate by one percent a year
- improve teaching so children learn better
- institute more effective remedial classes
- institute more bilingual classes
- improve student proficiency in English
- reduce the availability of drugs
- reduce drug use by instituting drug education in schools
- reduce the number of students in each class
- increase teaching and other school staff
- transfer or lay off ineffective staff
- have system audited for better management
- improve federal, state, local funding levels
- change state, local funding formulas

To really understand what is actually happening in your community, you will have to look at data that has been put together for your school district and community and others. **A list suggesting the kinds of data you might need to collect and study is included in EXHIBIT #7.**

**EXHIBIT #7:
TYPES OF DATA THE GROUP CAN COLLECT**

Many cities, particularly the larger ones, keep and publish information on each of their schools and all their school districts, which they must compile to obtain federal grants.

This information may be obtained from the school itself, the school district administration, or the school board.

The data your group may wish to look at could include:

- the number of students in your school
- the number of students for each teacher
- the mix of students by ethnic mix or race
- student reading and math scores
- student proficiency in English and Spanish
- the number and percent of students who have been in pre-school programs
- student dropout rate
- student disciplinary incidents
- student truancy rates
- student drug abuse warnings/expulsions
- student skill level at graduation
- percent graduating of those who started in the class
- highest grade attained by parents
- average income of parents
- the amount and percentage of federal, state, and local funds your school or district receives

Data such as this should be compared to what other schools have, to your school district and other districts, and to the whole city. If possible, you could then begin to compare what is going on in other cities.

C. GROWING LEADERS WITHIN THE GROUP

It is absolutely necessary for the group to develop its own leaders from within since the facilitator cannot become the group's leader.

It is not necessary for the group to have one and only one leader. Many leaders can develop within the group, depending on the tasks it will perform.

For example, people in a group might be involved in social events. They could hold social affairs, form a team or teams and get involved in sports, fundraising, or be involved in other kinds of activities. Leaders will emerge from within the group with the skills to fill the needs each of these kinds of activities calls for.

Through a variety of approaches, groups become involved in civic affairs and learn to relate to and understand the school system, its rules and regulations, its forms, and so on. This involvement teaches parents to learn how to deal with neighborhood and community issues, such as dropout prevention.

The group might develop a formal structure, but members will begin to coordinate activities and events based on their own skills, as well as how the other members of the group relate to and respect them.

As the group begins to learn more and its people get to know each other and grow together, leadership will emerge.

As a facilitator, you will have to use a number of techniques to encourage this to happen. You may consider having a special meeting or workshop for the group just on how to be a leader.

In any case, you will need to think carefully about what topics you will discuss in your first meetings to spark interest. You can develop a list of potential topics together as a group. Write them on a blackboard or a large piece of paper taped to the wall. Keep this list for future reference.

