



TIMELINE



Because the start date of the school year varies across

states and regions, schools may find themselves at different points in the implementation process during September. Most schools will be working to finalize and orient their PALMS teams, inform the local community, and build support for PALMS in the building. To leave sufficient time to complete the toolkit's Planning section prior to winter vacations, schools should work towards starting the visioning tools *no later than October*.

LOCAL SPOTLIGHT:



WBRC, the Fox TV affiliate in Birmingham, Alabama,

featured a story about the launching of PALMS at Montevallo Middle School. Julie Caine, Jonathan Sanford, and Montevallo Principal Vanessa Nason, were interviewed for the story. Kudos to the Montevallo communications director for facilitating this opportunity. To view a video clip of the story, visit the PALMS website home page, www.palmsproject.net.

Implementation Resource Brief:

Getting Started and Visioning

SEPTEMBER 2007

Implementation Tips & Pointers

BUILDING YOUR TEAM

Before diving into the Visioning tools, it is helpful to schedule some meetings during which your team can develop a group identity and get oriented to the process they are about to undertake. Below we offer some suggested activities for these initial meetings.

- Use a PALMS case study as a springboard for discussion about the qualities of successful family/school partnerships
- Discuss the group's purpose and motivation and clarify any points of confusions
- Share stories about how each team members knew they were going to college
- Make plans for keep the whole school involved and informed about the team's progress
- Brainstorm ideas to recruit parents, community organizations, and institutions of higher education
- Discuss the toolkit timeline, steps in the process, and the purpose of specific tools
- Set a year-long calendar for meetings, including some possible longer, offsite, or summer meetings



VISIONING

Tools 1 and 2 will help your team articulate their aspirations for stronger family-school partnerships at your school.

With a group larger than 6, these tools may take longer than the times suggested in the toolkit. Plan for this when scheduling your meetings.

If working with a larger group, you can put participants in smaller discussion groups. If your group is smaller than 6, you may be able to cover Tools 1 and 2 during a one-hour meeting and plan another hour-long meeting for Tool 3.

During Tool 2, your team may gravitate toward a particular time-frame when brainstorming activities (i.e. 6 months, 18 months, 3-5 years). It may be

easier for some teams to visualize the short-term or long-term. If you find this is happening in your group, go with the flow. The objective is to encourage positive energy and ideas, not to create a list that is set in stone. Do be mindful of the time, however, and don't let the meeting run over.

During Tool 3, your team will articulate its vision for a vibrant family-school partnership.

Though the toolkit suggests spending 30 minutes on this tool, facilitators have told us that having a one-hour block is a more appropriate time frame for this critical activity, as the vision lays the foundation for future work.

Rather than randomly selecting a volunteer to capture the groups' ideas in writing, you may want to pre-select a member who is comfortable in a leadership role.

If at the end of the meeting the group does not feel inspired by the vision statement they have created, schedule a second meeting to try the activity again with a clear head.

SAMPLE VISION STATEMENTS

In partnership with families, our school, and members of the community, we are committed to opening doors to continuing education for all our students regardless of ethnicity, family income, or educational background. – Helen Tyson Middle School PALMS Team

The future of our children depends on what we do today. We believe that school, and family partnerships can open the door to higher education for all our students. We will form an active community, committed to learning from each other to achieve our common goal. – Hommocks Middle School PALMS team

The school will be an inclusive and participatory space, suitable to the growth and comprehensive formation of all members of its educational community. We are motivated by the highest expectations and a solid commitment to make use of all available resources in order to prepare families with the necessary tools to make sure our children have access to post-secondary education. – Padres Unidos (Parent Group at Hommocks)

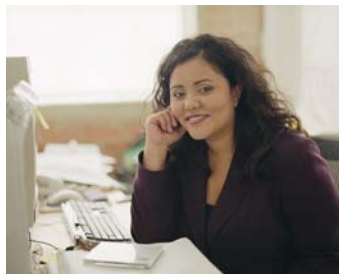
Especially for Facilitators

In this section we discuss the issues faced by facilitators from the original PALMS implementation sites—and steps they took to work through them.

When recruiting your team, it's important to select people who are not only passionate, but have a track record of "getting things done." Participating in the team is time-consuming and facilitators need to give potential recruits a realistic sense of the time commitment up front.

At the start of the school year, the facilitator should plan to inform the whole school about PALMS and build support from the entire faculty. To promote teacher buy-in, the principal should be a visible supporter of PALMS. One site used a faculty meeting to report on the progress of its PALMS team, opening the discussion by asking teachers to share how they got to college.

Later in the year, facilitators should consider giving team members a



role in reporting progress, so that the success of PALMS is seen as a shared endeavor.

During early meetings, facilitators may need to leave time for team members to talk about previous outreach efforts that were not successful. Though difficult, these conversations can allow colleagues to clear their minds and take a fresh look at how to address the issues that were raised.

Early on it is critical to help the group learn to work together and

to set the expectation that the voices of all members, not just veteran teachers or administrators, are valued equally. To help new teachers on his team feel more comfortable and prepared during meetings, one facilitator sent out the meeting agenda ahead of time by email.

Recruiting a parent to serve on the team can be difficult, and language can be a barrier. PALMS now has all the toolkit handouts available in Spanish, so that parents who are bilingual but prefer to read text in Spanish can participate in discussions. One site formed a separate group for parents who were more comfortable attending meetings with other parents that were facilitated in Spanish by the bilingual facilitator of the PALMS team. As the year progressed, the parent group and the faculty group begin to meet together.

"All these activities [brainstormed during Tool Two] are just a bridge; they're not an end in themselves. They are a bridge toward the larger goal of parent education and involvement."

— Adonis Calderon, PALMS Facilitator at Hommocks Middle

Tips for Working with the Media

BEFORE AN INTERVIEW:

NEVER take a reporter's call "on the fly." If you get an unexpected call, find out the reporter's deadline and call them back promptly. This gives you time to get your thoughts together.

ALWAYS ask about the nature of the story. If you don't think you're the right person for the interview, refer them to someone else.

ALWAYS prepare talking points. Take a few moments to write down the 2-3 points you wish to make. We recommend the following:

- 1. Our school is committed to helping our Latino students succeed in middle, high school, and beyond.** As a group, Latinos have the highest drop out rate in the country, and only about 13 percent of Latinos hold bachelor's degrees. This is an issue that must be addressed as early as the middle grades.
- 2. Research shows that students do better in school when their families are involved.** Students are more likely to go to college when schools and families discuss how to help them prepare for higher education, including taking challenging courses during middle and high school.
- 3. PALMS' mission is to provide educators with tools to help increase the number of Latino students who go on to college.** As part of the PALMS Outreach Leaders Network, we are learning from other middle schools from across the country who are helping Latino students and their families start planning and preparing for college early.

ALWAYS return media calls as quickly as possible. If you do not have time to speak to the journalist before their deadline, locate someone else for them to interview.

ALWAYS ask when the story is expected to be published. This will allow you to locate and save the article.

DURING THE INTERVIEW:

ALWAYS avoid jargon. Remember that your audience may not be familiar with acronyms, technical terms or references. Use language that can be easily understood.

NEVER squander a media opportunity. When the reporter asks, "Do you want to add anything else," always take the opportunity to mention a key point.

ALWAYS identify yourself. Spell out your name and title if necessary. Be sure to mention PALMS [Postsecondary Access for Middle-grades Students] and our major funder, the Lumina Foundation for Education.

ALWAYS offer additional resources including the PALMS website, (www.palmsproject.net), contact information for PALMS staff (Amy Clark, Project Director, 860-683-8593), and any additional contacts from your school.