

Foreword

Family engagement and participation in decision-making is central to school improvement and student achievement. Studies show that children perform better at school, have fewer absences and behavioral concerns, and graduate at higher rates when families are engaged. In addition, school efforts are more effective when positive family-school relationships are established and parent voices are heard. State Superintendent Tony Evers shared, “We have seen, through our work to close Wisconsin’s achievement gaps, that involving parents in the educational process creates an environment where students thrive culturally as well as academically.”

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (WDPI) is pleased to bring you the updated and dynamic resource, *Serving on Groups That Make Decisions: A Guide for Families* (Guidebook). If you are using the Guidebook for the first time, it will serve as a useful introduction to the opportunities for your participation, along with the types of groups commonly used in decision-making. The Guidebook is designed to help prepare and empower you to successfully serve on a group. You will have access to practical tools, tips, and strategies often used by decision-makers. The Guidebook will be beneficial in defining your role as you represent your family and others on decision-making groups. Finally, the Guidebook will assist you in developing new skills or refreshing acquired skills essential for active and meaningful participation.

The highlight of the revised Guidebook is a section entitled *Understanding Data as Information*. We live in a world with more available data than ever before. In education, using data is a powerful tool to determine if schools efforts are working and if students are meeting their goals. This section provides eight steps to assist you and other group members in making well-informed data-based decisions to improve the experiences of children. It also contains numerous resources for you to access and explore relevant data for your family and community.

On behalf of WDPI, I hope you enjoy your journey as a true contributor in decision-making groups. Thank you for making a difference in the lives of your child and other children in Wisconsin.

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How to Use This Guidebook

Dear Reader,

This guidebook has been designed to help you to participate "at the table" with other decision-makers. As you make your way through this guidebook, consider which issues are most important to you, which groups have the authority to make changes, and which processes are the most comfortable for you. Remember, this is your journey!

Once you have completed this guidebook, you will feel more confident and comfortable serving on a decision-making group. You will find that the materials in this guidebook apply to a wide range of situations where decisions are made.

Maybe you want to start slowly. You could attend a focus group that is seeking family perspective about an issue. Maybe you want to get more involved and serve on a committee that plans and takes action on an issue. Whatever it may be, one day you will look back on your journey and you will see that these first small steps led to important changes down the road for families and children!

We hope this guidebook inspires you to volunteer and to become active on groups in a variety of ways, such as information gathering, goal setting, planning, collaborating, evaluating and participating in processes for reaching agreement. There are many levels at which you can be involved: in your child's care, your child's school, your community and on county or state-level groups that are working to improve the lives of families and children. You can make a difference!

The Guidebook Writers



What is inside?

First, take a moment to page through the Guidebook to preview the sections. Each section will have a divider page with a summary of what you will learn in that section. As you progress through the Guidebook you will learn about:

Section 1: Opportunities to Get Involved

Section 2: Types of Groups

Section 3: Processes Groups Use

Section 4: Tools Groups Use

Section 5: Tips and Strategies for Groups

Section 6: Understanding Data as Information

Section 7: The Role of Families on Groups

Section 8: Skills for Serving on Groups

Appendix: Glossary

Throughout the Guidebook you will find boxes titled 'Families Ask Questions' and 'Words of Wisdom'. This information has come directly from family members who have experience serving on groups that make decisions.

You will also find tips, examples, worksheets, definitions and additional resources.

For your convenience, this guidebook and resources are collected on one website:

www.servingongroups.org

Table of Contents

Section 1: Opportunities to Get Involved

Section 2: Types of Groups

Section 3: Processes Groups Use

Section 4: Tools Groups Use

Section 5: Tips and Strategies for Groups

Section 6: Understanding Data as Information

Section 7: The Role of Families on Groups

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