1. **Rationale/Basis of the Practice**

Consistent academic performance can result when a community agrees and commits to selected educational ideals. Green Oaks Fundamental serves as an alternative school with specific educational values in place which are continually acted upon. One important cultural value is the importance of parent involvement in the work we do.

While parent participation has always been a strong component of our program the current economic trends make it common for both parents to work full time, thus creating a yearly challenge to our school on how to get enough parent participation. We continuously monitor parent hours and survey data to determine how to increase levels of participation. For example, in 2007-2008 we saw a drop in participation. This led us to work closely with our PTA and site council to develop strategies to address this issue.

*Elementary Makes the Grade* stresses the importance of working with community stakeholders to meet the needs of the “whole child”. They state that “while a standard-based system focuses on a student’s need to meet rigorous academic standards, academic success is more likely with the development of the whole child is attended to within the context of the family, school and community.” The practice of including family collaboration as an expectation resulted from our shared belief in that statement. When staff has met to discuss the components of our system that are essential to maintaining consistently high test scores, it is readily agreed that family participation plays a major role in providing support to staff and students by helping our kids to believe in themselves.

Our target population is the school as a whole, which is considered a community. Green Oaks has no specific residential boundary, thereby being made up of families from across the district. We are also an open enrollment school which allows families a choice to attend our site based upon its mission. Families attending the school are bound together by this mission and act upon it. Collaboration with families is part of the mission statement. The target population also includes nearby businesses which support our efforts to provide incentives to our kids and time presenting reading materials and other support with supplies.

The school wide goal is to provide a safe learning environment which facilitates high student achievement supported by a strong level of parent involvement. A child’s capacity to learn increases when a sound structure is in place and when parents and the school have a shared responsibility for academic achievement and social progress. High academic achievement and social harmony is a natural outcome when a safe educational atmosphere exists. We therefore have taken great strides to include families as partners in order to meet the goal of a safe learning environment where families are very involved.
2. **Description of the Practice**

Thirty-two years ago it was agreed that Green Oaks would become a fundamental school with the aim of creating an educational culture where students could feel safe and high expectations for learning was the norm. As our school culture has evolved we have strengthened our practices and worked to provide students with good first teaching and, a sound foundation in basic academic education with an emphasis on developing literacy, mathematical competency, and higher order thinking skills. In order to accomplish this one of the most important needs is a strong parent partnership where the collaborative efforts of the family and school facilitate a positive learning environment. As the practice has evolved, our PTA currently plays a very important role in assisting with strategic planning to keep up high standards of parent involvement. The PTA Historian calculates the total number of volunteer hours and then has them published in the weekly bulletin. Both PTA and Site Council are important participants in making school decisions. They also help bring in other partners to support our work. Recently, Walmart contributed $1000 toward incentives for our school wide reading program.

In order to continue to meet our need for parent assistance, specific areas are identified and centered upon where parent participation is crucial and then outward to areas where parent involvement would be considered desirable. During staff meetings, throughout the year, discussions focus on areas where parent assistance is necessary to support new programs and where additional support may be required for continuing programs. In addition, each grade level develops activities and tasks for volunteers meant to enrich a child’s learning and which would otherwise not be implemented due to limited time constraints in the school work day. Site Council and our Parent Teacher Association meet monthly to review needs and monitor the number of volunteer hours. They also strategize on how to receive volunteer time, contributions from new community members, and additional training to better support parents.

Our staff, students, and parents observe the direct benefits from expecting high parent involvement in our school. For example, specific grade level expectations for parental involvement in nightly homework leads to near one hundred percent homework return rate. Students feel a sense of care when their parents, grandparents, and other family members arrive to help out. Students in grades K-6 all express positive feelings when a family member arrives to contribute. In addition, our school survey confirms the importance of a parent partnership when comments are returned which express a sense of appreciation for the environment created as a fundamental school that emphasizes volunteering.

We have developed grade and school level parent partnership practices, all of which aid in producing motivated avid learners and consistent high test scores. Each grade level depends on parent support and therefore commits to an event, project or ongoing activities involving parents. Parents who are unable to work in the classroom due to personal time constraints often appreciate the opportunity to provide materials for student reinforcement. During Back to School Night it is expected that a family member attend on the evening and as a result we have a 95% attendance rate. The fourth through sixth grade staff give all parents a volunteer handbook detailing volunteer opportunities, guidelines on becoming a committed volunteer, and tips for working successfully with children. Recognizing that parents engaging in working with their children in a direct manner is the most effective form of parent involvement, teachers provide guidance and specific tasks for completion. For example, all grade levels have parents who work as, Art Docent volunteers, assist with homework and student projects, serve on the PTA as class representative, drive for fieldtrips, and work with small groups under the direction
of the teacher. Other parent teams provide choir leadership, piano players, Talent Show coordination, and Beaver Buck Store assistance. Parent volunteers also open the computer lab during lunch recess to allow for additional curricular access time.

In addition, each class provides a highly enriched activity which families attend or support. Kindergarten families assist with the annual Hoe-Down, an adventure in providing students with an inner view of life as a cowboy. Entire families dress up in western apparel for this adventure. Our first grade teachers put on an annual Oktoberfest program for families to attend which requires their assistance with food preparation, decorating and much teamwork. The value in the event is how our first graders learn a number of German vocabulary words and are able to absorb aspects of another culture. It is incredible to see moms and dads dancing with their children while listening to music from Germany. Second grade engages in a letter writing exercise where students write to grandparents, who in turn write back with stories about an experience from their lives when they were second graders. Third grade presents Pioneer Day which includes parent teams creating various stations based on a theme from the late 1800’s. Students dress in late nineteenth century clothing so they can immerse themselves in this time period. Fourth grade parents assist by making food based on the historical American Indian diet as students participate in a Potlatch celebration. Parent performers present a “play” called The Short Cut to enrich student knowledge about moving west during the gold rush. Fifth grade parents contribute by assisting with a Living Museum project. Students investigate a detailed biography of a famous past person then present themselves as the historical figure by dressing the part during a school wide presentation. Sixth grade parents help with a Greek Festival for the purpose of providing Greek food and to celebrate its history while students create skits from this fascinating time period. Without family assistance, these events would not exist. The accumulation of time from our partnership totals approximately 200 hours per week and is among the highest in a school district of more than 40,000 students.

The principal supports staff and the community by seeing that all families have access to the principal’s email to keep in contact as issues unfold. The use of Connect Ed, an automated telephone service, for school wide announcements and the weekly Beaver Bulletin, a newsletter with current school events, allows for increased communication with our community. The bulletin also includes opportunities for parents to improve on their child-rearing skills. Our school website offers parents an easy way to stay up to date with information about the school. Teachers also maintain websites which allow parents to stay connected to their child’s classroom. Our office staff uses the assistance of parents and former students, who now attend high school, to support ancillary office duties, such as: copying, sorting, and planning group events. Parents serve as paid yard duty monitors and as substitutes when our clerk and secretary are absent.

During weekly orientation meetings for perspective new families, our office staff ensures that each parent is well received and understands that they are welcome at our school. This practice is particularly appreciated by grandparents and other community members who are not used to being on a school site. We strive to know the names of as many individuals as possible so each person knows we believe they are special to us.

The office puts out a parent manual which clearly states the roles everyone plays in facilitating a caring, structured environment. Parents and teachers read the manual with students so everyone understands academic and social expectations. The principal monitors classrooms daily and spends every lunch with students to be visible and to promote positive behavior.
There is a school wide incentive program which promotes good citizenship. The Beaver Buck Store program is hosted by parent volunteers once a month and receives excited students who cash in their Beaver Bucks for well earned prizes. The citizenship program coupled with strong expectations by staff and parents for individual conscientious decision making per child has kept our school suspension rates near zero for several years.

The practice of expecting a high degree of family volunteer time directly contributes to student achievement as has been established through research. One example comes from William H. Jeynes in an article entitled “Parent Involvement and Student Achievement: A Meta-Analysis”, where after drawing from 77 studies and over 300,000 students, he states that there is “substantial” support to the result that “parent involvement has a significant impact across various populations”. He goes on to say that parental programs make a large difference as well. Our high levels of achievement, strong community and positive behavioral program support Mr. Jeynes’ findings regarding the value of parent participation.

3. Results of the Practice

Our progress monitoring includes keeping track of our volunteer minutes, conducting staff, Site Council, and PTA meetings focused on fostering continued parent support, and using feedback to recruit parents where they are most needed. Additionally, we also conduct an annual parent survey which continually supports our practice.

In the 2008-2009 school year we recorded a total of 9,956.4 parent volunteer hours. Comparison data between our 2008 and 2009 parent survey continues to show the support and trust we have with our parent community. In 2008, 98.6% of our parents indicated that I know what my child is expected to learn in reading/English, math, science, and social science, this increased to 99.6% in 2009. Ninety-eight percent of parents in 2009 felt their children are challenged and 94.7% feel that we provide their students with the resources they need in order to be successful. Ninety-five percent of parents at the site feel their input on improving the school program is valued, and 98.7% feel they are welcome at meetings were decisions on school program occur and academic performance is discussed. This data reflects the strength of our partnership with parents to ensure our students continue to achieve at high levels.

Our process for continual improvement uses data to identify where weak cluster areas may appear, and then ask how a stronger home/school connection to boost an area can be implemented. For example, last year our writing strategies cluster was lower in proportion to other standards. Staff then has made modification to teaching strategies and has included parent homework guidance in their thinking. Additionally, we monitor other data indicators as discussed above and use that information in consultation with our parent organization and site council to identify additionally strategies to encourage parent involvement both at home and on the campus.