



Positive, Proactive Parental Involvement

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The National PTA

In their *National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs* the National Parent Teacher Association (1997) cites research that clearly indicates:

1. When parents are involved, students achieve more, regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnic/racial background, or the parents' education level.
2. The more extensive the parent involvement, the higher the student achievement.
3. When parents are involved, students exhibit more positive attitudes and behavior.
4. Children from diverse cultural backgrounds tend to do better when parents and professionals collaborate to bridge the gap between the culture at home and the learning institution.
5. Secondary students whose parents remain involved make better transitions, maintain the quality of their work, and develop realistic plans for their future. Students whose parents are not involved are more likely to drop out.
6. The most accurate predictor of a student's achievement in school is not income or social status, but the extent to which that student's family is able to:
 - a) create a home environment that encourages learning.
 - b) communicate high, yet reasonable expectations for their children's achievement and future careers
 - c) become involved in their children's education at school and in the community.



Problems Faced by Parents

1. They may have grown up in families devoid of goodparenting skills. They have experienced no models of effective parenting themselves. They may not be sure how to do it even if they want to.
2. They may have had a very negative school experience themselves. They may be hostile and bitter about how they believe they were treated, and they are ready to project those perceived injustices onto you.
3. They may doubt their own literacy or academic skills. They are unwilling to put themselves in a position to look foolish or ignorant.
4. They may be totally overwhelmed by situations outside of school. Lack of money and resources, problems with other children, dysfunctional relationships, job stresses, difficulties with the law, illness, and other pressures can leave a parent feeling disoriented and disenfranchised.
5. They may speak little or no English.
6. They may come from a different culture and are intimidated by the unfamiliar customs and protocols at your school.
7. They may feel hopeless and/or powerless. Some parents have become so disillusioned with their realities that they feel that nothing they do makes any difference.
8. They may be unable to attend school functions because of job responsibilities, the demands of younger children, obligations to elderly relatives, or lack of transportation.



Beginning Communication With Parents

- Start early. Before school starts or on the first day of school make a contact with the parents. Introduce yourself with a letter, and let them know that you want to work *with* them to help their child have the best year possible. Be friendly, be professional, be inviting, and be sure you use correct grammar and punctuation on all written communications! You may want to use a fun font or clip art to make your letter seem less officious. Give them your contact information, and invite them to use it.
- Give the parents enough of an overview of your plans and expectations that they can see you know what you are doing.
- Provide a translation for parents who have limited use of English.
- Let them know how important they are in the ultimate success of their children's lives. Always demonstrate respect for the family and the family's primary role in helping students become responsible adults.
- Make the first move. Do not wait for parent to contact you. If you care about what happens to your students, you have to involve yourself with their parents.

Top 10 Ways to Keep in Touch With Parents

- Phone
- E-mail
- Voice mail
- Fax
- Web site (school or class)
- Personal contacts
- Newsletters
- Academic calendar
- News bulletins/community bulletin boards
- Notes and cards (if all else fails, send them a registered letter.)
- Make your first contact a positive one!

Positive Parental Involvement

Form Proactive Partnerships With Parents:

- Have family inventory sheets filled out
- Send home copies of class policies, standards, procedures, etc.
- Send home newsletters (with pictures!)
- Call or send letters with good news as often as possible

During a Parent Conference:

- Be warm, be friendly, and be assertive
- Utilize good listening and interpersonal communication skills
- Refuse to be defense
- Stick to the subject
- Admit your mistakes
- Establish a common ground

NEVER gossip with or about parents!

Involve Parents as much as possible!

How to Handle an Upset Parent

- Keep your voice calm; lower your tone and slow your speech.
- If meeting in person, treat parents as guests. Offer them a cold drink or a cup of coffee. Try to make the parent(s) feel as comfortable as possible.
- Remain in control. Be sympathetic and empathetic, but NOT defensive.
- Really listen to the other person. Practice active listening skills. Let them “get it all out” without interrupting or commenting. Take notes if you need to. Acknowledge the other person’s frustration, anger, and/or pain.
- Address each point that is brought up that is relevant to the subject of the conference. Stick to the issues.
- Be open, but be specific and firm about your educational philosophy and your reasons for your actions.
- Give positive suggestions. Compliment the parent(s) for caring.
- Provide closure and a plan of action.



20 Ways Parents Can Help at School

1. Help build resources and equipment (bird houses, collecting nets, shelves, learning centers).
2. Act as monitor for cafeteria, hall, or playground.
3. Prepare and bring food items.
4. Assist with special tutoring.
5. Make a presentation or performance.
6. Read to students.
7. Job sharing.
8. Help make classroom decorations and design learning walls, etc.
9. File, sort, hole punch, copy etc. Help with secretarial chores.
10. Make learning games.
11. Contact and/or organize other parents.
12. Chaperone a field trip (even if it is just to the grove of trees at the end of the campus).
13. Help prepare materials for labs and projects.
14. Donate materials.
15. Help with special classroom or *school events and projects.
16. Assist with pet or plant care.
17. Contact businesses about possible donations or sponsorships.
18. Help with class newsletter.
19. Help with web site.
20. Help students with computers and other technological aids.



Dealing With the Over-Involved Parent

1. Be proactive. Invite them when it is convenient for you.
2. Ask the parent to volunteer in classes or areas other than those her/his child attends.
3. Dilute their power by asking underrepresented groups to serve on committees, chair events, and volunteer with them.
4. Steer them towards working for the benefit of *all* students and sincerely praise their efforts. (Many times these folks are just starved for attention or the chance to contribute something meaningful.)
5. Clearly identify their limits. You are the professional. Let them know who is in charge and has ultimate veto power.
6. Be cautious about sharing information regarding other students, faculty, or administrators. Non-school personnel should not be privy to any confidential information. Gossip is a huge no-no!
7. Keep your sense of self; do not let yourself be caught up in their agendas. Do not be defensive.
8. Invite them to help you get other parents involved.
9. Remind them that it is natural to want a child to *do* her/his best, but it is unfair and unrealistic to ask her/him to *be* the best.
10. Keep your sense of humor. (Sooner or later her/his child will move on and so will s/he.)

Helpful Hints For Communicating With Your Child



- ✚ Listen with your FULL attention. A good way to ensure *her/his* full attention is put them in the front seat of your car and drive them around as you talk with them. (Unless they want to hurl themselves from a moving vehicle, they've got no place to run.)
- ✚ Be aware of body language, both yours and theirs.
- ✚ Use silence to understand your child's meanings and feelings.
- ✚ Use open responses to keep the child talking. "I see." "Tell me more about that part."
- ✚ Accept and respect your child's feelings. Feelings don't have to be justified, they just ARE.
- ✚ Don't interrupt.
- ✚ Check out your child's feelings by reflecting what s/he says.
 - "I think I heard you say that you were really angry with Susan."
 - "So you were feeling helpless? Like you wanted to hide?"
- ✚ Be calm. Speak in a quiet voice. Use economy of words (don't talk too much).
- ✚ Stick to the subject.
- ✚ Don't assume that you are making yourself clear. Check for understanding periodically. "Can you tell me in your own words what you think I'm telling you?"
- ✚ Problem solve by discussing a variety of solutions. Emphasize your child's choice in selecting a plan of action.

- ✚ Give your point of view as just that. It's not the law or the only good solution.
- ✚ Don't be a dictator. Remember that children also learn by failing.
Allow the child to learn successful problem solving from failing once in a while
- ✚ Avoid nagging, threatening, criticizing, lecturing, or probing.
- ✚ NO Name Calling!!! Attack the problem, not the person.
- ✚ Whenever possible, use humor.

My Mother Was Mean Enough

Someday when my children are old enough to understand the logic that motivates a parent, I will tell them:

I loved you enough...to ask where you were going, with whom, and what time you would be home..

I loved you enough...to insist that you save your money and buy a bike for yourself even though we could afford to buy one for you.

I loved you enough...to be silent and let you discover that your new best friend was a creep.

I loved you enough...to make you go pay for the bubble gum you had taken and tell the clerk, "I stole this yesterday, and I want to pay for it."

I loved you enough...to stand over you for two hours while you cleaned your room, a job that should have taken 15 minutes.

I loved you enough...to let you see anger, disappointment, and tears in my eyes.
Children must learn that their parents aren't perfect.

I loved you enough...to let you assume the responsibility for your actions even when the penalties were so harsh they almost broke my heart.

But most of all, I loved you enough...to say NO when I knew you would hate me for it. Those were the most difficult battles of all. I'm glad I won them, because in the end you won, too.

And someday when your children are old enough to understand the logic that motivates parents, you will tell *them*...

For the Parent to Take Regarding Her/His Child:

How Much Do You Know About Your Child?

1. If your child had a choice, what would s/he prefer to be called?
2. Who is your child's closest friend?
3. Who does your child most admire?
4. Of what is your child most afraid?
5. What is your child's favorite thing to do with his/her friends?
6. What is your child's favorite kind of music?
7. What was the best movie your child ever watched?
8. At what age does your child plan to leave home?
9. What is your child's favorite color?
10. If your child had to wear one outfit for a month, which outfit would it be?
11. What most embarrasses your child?
12. If your child could change one thing about herself/himself, what would it be?
13. If your child could change one thing about your family, what would it be?
14. What trait do you have that your child most values?
15. What trait do you have that your child would most like to change?
16. If there were suddenly no electricity in the world, what appliance would your child miss the most?
17. What is your child's weight (within 2 pounds)?
18. What was your child's proudest moment?
19. What was your child's saddest moment?
20. If your child could make one wish come true, what would it be?

Compare your answers with those of your child. Score one point for each answer that is the same or reasonably close. If you score 16 or better, congratulate yourself for really knowing your child. If your score is 11 –15, you may want to think about spending more time catching up with what is new with your child. If your score is 10 or less, you definitely need to spend more time finding out about what is going on with your child.

For the Child to Take While the Parent Takes Her/His Test:

About You

1. If you had a choice, what would you prefer to be called?
2. Who is your closest friend?
3. Who does you most admire?
4. Of what are you most afraid?
5. What is your favorite thing to do with your friends?
6. What is your favorite kind of music?
7. What was the best movie you ever watched?
8. At what age do you plan to leave home?
9. What is your favorite color?
10. If you had to wear one outfit for a month, which outfit would it be?
11. What most embarrasses you?
12. If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?
13. If you could change one thing about your family, what would it be?
14. What trait do you have that you most value?
15. What trait does your parent have that you would most like to change?
16. If there were suddenly no electricity in the world, what appliance would you miss the most?
17. What is your weight (within 2 pounds)?
18. What was your proudest moment?
19. What was your saddest moment?
20. If you could make one wish come true, what would it be?

Now compare your answers to those of your parent. Give her/him one point for every answer that is the same or reasonably close (you be the judge). Your parent has the scoring code.

For a parent to fill out about her/his child:

What I See In My Child

The form consists of five concentric squares. The innermost square is the smallest and contains the text "Put Your Child's Name Here". The space between this square and the next larger square is the narrowest. The space between the second and third squares is wider. The space between the third and fourth squares is wider still. The space between the fourth and fifth squares is the widest. This structure allows parents to place the most important attributes closest to the center and less important ones further out.

Put your child's name in the center square. Fill in the spaces around her/his name with words that describe the strengths you see in her/him. Place the most important attributes in the spaces closest to the center. You can use Use words from the *Strength Word List* or use your own. When you have finished filling in all the spaces, give this sheet to your child.

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STRENGTH WORD LIST
(These can help you get started)

Be sure to include words that describe your child's:

SPIRITUAL STRENGTHS
MENTAL STRENGTHS

romantic
busy
kind
artistic
careful
convincing
friendly
gentle
loyal
distinctive
perfectionist
exact
tenacious
tenacious
ambitious
outgoing
steadfast
poised
strong
considerate
fulfilled
manager
open-minded
talented
witty
systematic
trustworthy
foresight
empathetic
cheerful
energetic
daring
coordinated

investing
strong-willed
motivated
understanding
disciplined
self-reliant
persistent
neat
caring
thinker
clever
self-determined
well-informed
creative
orderly
individualistic
searching
appreciative
fair-minded
respected
flexible
likes new ideas
forceful
predictable
intelligent
encouraging
imaginative
pursuing
compassionate
motivating
disciplined
risk taker
loyal

PHYSICAL STRENGTHS
EMOTIONAL STRENGTHS

serene
organizer
tactful
committed
spontaneous
commanding
tolerant
goal-directed
progressive
sharp
capable
certain
looked up to
dedicated
courageous
consistent
honorable
productive
determined
planner
efficient
cooperative
dependable
comforting
sociable
serious
adaptable
forgiving
visionary
artistic
sharing
courageous
fun-loving

prudent
confident
tireless
industrious
thoughtful
expressive
settled
persuasive
affectionate
graceful
reliable
leader
growing
eager
active
influential
giving
original
thrifty
unselfish
self-aware
self-directed
adjusted
inquiring
practical
unique
precise
listener
humorous
athletic
caring
patient
perceptive

Top 10 Ways to Keep in Touch With Parents

- **Phone**
- **E-mail**
- **Voice mail**
- **Fax**
- **Web site (school or class)**
- **Personal contacts**
- **Newsletters**
- **Academic calendar**
- **News bulletins/community bulletin boards**
- **Notes and cards (if all else fails, send them a registered letter.)**
- **Make your first contact a positive one!**

“Using the McDonald’s Approach to Generate Parent Involvement”

Joan Moorman

Principal, Barranca Elem. Covina, CA



1. **Tell students about upcoming presentations.**
2. **Remind parents-and remind them often.**
3. **Offer the parents something free.**
4. **Make it snappy.**
5. **Advertise for free.**
6. **Involve students.**
7. **Provide childcare.**
8. **Write press releases**
9. **Offer quality programs.**
10. **Be innovative.**



Building Partnerships That Work

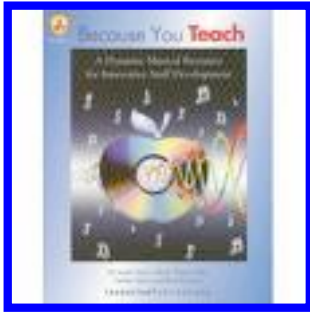
From "Building Family Partnerships That Last" by Mavis G. Sanders
Education Leadership, November, 1996.

Ingredients for success:

Increasing Volunteerism:

Making Partnerships Work:

- 1) Partnerships are share responsibilities.
- 2) Partnerships take time.
- 3) Partnerships reach out to all family members.
- 4) Partnerships improve incrementally.
- 5) Partnerships are important throughout the grades.
- 6) Partnerships need students.
- 7) Partnerships include the community.
- 8) Partnerships include the hard-to-reach
- 9) Partnerships link to the curriculum and student learning.
- 10) Partnerships follow the 6 types of involvement.
 - a) parenting
 - b) communicating
 - c) volunteering
 - d) learning at home
 - e) decision making
 - f) collaborating with the community (Epstein, 1995).



Getting Parents More Involved

By Debbie Silver

In Because You Teach: A Dynamic Musical Resource for Innovative Staff Development. Hunt, K.: Selby, M.: Silver, D.: Wormeli, R. Nashville, TN: Incentive Publications, 2006.

Objectives:

To explore reasons that parents are not more involved

To generate additional means of enlisting parental support

Time:

30 – 40 minutes

Materials:

Poster Paper
Markers

Process:

Part A Have the group brainstorm ideas about why parents are not more involved in your school. On the group's poster list reasons you know or suspect why some parents are hesitant to come to your school.

On a second poster list all of the things your school or individuals in your school are currently doing to try and get more parents involved. Beside each listing put the words, "working," "not working," "kind of working," or "don't know yet."

Compare the two posters and see if there are gaps between perceived problems for parents and solutions being tried by the school. On a third poster list some possible strategies the school as a whole and individual teachers could do to help motivate parents to be more involved in their children's education.

Part B

Brainstorm about ways parents could help the school (besides fund raisers). Include both large and small jobs. Compile your ideas as a checklist you can send home to parents asking them to indicate the things they would be willing to do. Be sure to include specific job descriptions

including precisely what would be required, how much time it would take, and other important data. Provide a place for parents to tell you how much time they are willing to give. Have designated volunteers (parents) follow up and schedule parents to help.

Teacher Outreach

Objective: To encourage teachers to initiate a positive outreach to the parents of every child

Time: ongoing

Materials: Student records
Templates and/or spreadsheet software

Process:
Generate a list of every student you teach. Include the parents' names, addresses, and phone numbers. Set a goal for how many parents you will contact each week with something positive about her/his/their student. Keep a record of whom you call or write. Make notes beside each name about what you said or wrote. (Remember this contact is to be a positive, encouraging message.)

Creating a Parental Resource File

Objectives: To start teachers generating a variety of resources to help parents better understand the problems and solutions of their particular situation

To keep teachers current on topics regarding typical characteristics and predicaments of their student population

Time: ongoing

Materials: Access to NAESP's *Report to Parents*
Various journals, periodicals and other sources of information for parents
Annotated bibliographies about books that are helpful to parents

Process:

Create files of 1- to 2- page hand-outs and articles on various topics of concern to parents. Make sure they are simple, to the point, and easy to read. Include a bibliography when appropriate. At parent conferences have your files available so that you can pull out information sheets to give to parents (for them to keep). (Parental information sheets written in both English and Spanish are available from the National Association of Elementary School Principals – NAESP. They are provided to members in quarterly newsletters with permission to reprint. Topics cover everything from dealing with bullies to healthy food choices to overscheduled children to fostering honesty in kids.) It is a good idea to form an “exchange club” at your school so that all teachers get copies of relevant and helpful information for parents who are interested.

Create a book list on various topics of concern to parents. Poll other teachers for recommendations of helpful books for parents. When a parent asks for help or more information, give them a copy of the list with a notation about which book(s) you think they will find beneficial.

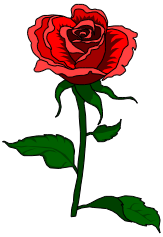
Suggested Readings:

Beckwith, Harry. *Selling the Invisible*. New York: Warner Books, (1997).

Epstein, J.L. “School/Family/Community Partnerships: Caring for the Children We Share.” *Phi Delta Kappan* 76, 9: (1995) 701-712,.

Henderson, Anne T.: and Berla, N., eds. *A New Generation of Evidence: The Family Is Critical to Student Achievement*. Washington, D.C.; Center for Law and Education, (1997).

Seefeldt, Carol: and Goldsmith, N. Family Night Out: A Way to Involve Low-Income Parents. National Association of Elementary School Principals 16, 4: (1998).



Roses

“When we plant a rose seed in the earth, we notice that it is small, but we do not criticize it as ‘rootless and stemless.’ We treat it as a seed, giving it the water and nourishment required of a seed.

When it first shoots up out of the earth, we do not condemn it as immature and underdeveloped; nor do we criticize the buds for not being open when they appear. We stand in wonder at the process taking place and give the plant the care it needs at each stage of its development.

The rose is a rose from the time it is a seed to the time it dies. Within it, at all times, it contains its whole potential. It seems to be constantly in the process of change; yet at each state, at each moment, it is perfectly all right as it is.”

--Timothy Gallaway

Book Recommendations:

Canfield, Jack & Harold Wells. *100 Ways to Enhance Self Concept in the Classroom*. ISBN- 0-13-636951 or 0-13-636944-8 pbk.

Canter, Lee & Marlene Canter. *Parents On Your Side*. ISBN-0-939007-39-8

Canter, Lee & Marlene Canter. *Parents On Your Side. Resource Materials Workbook*. ISBN-0-939007-40-1

Haddon, Mark. 2003. *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. ISBN- 0385512104

Hallowell, Edward, M. and Ratey, John J. 1994. *Driven to Distraction: Recognizing and Coping with Attention Deficit Disorder from Childhood through Adulthood*. ISBN- 0-684-80128-0

Levine, Mel, M.D. 1990. *Keeping A Head in School*. (A book about learning disorders and strengths for students 11-years- old and older). ISBN- 0838820697

Levine, Mel, M.D. 1993. *All Kinds of Minds: A Young Student's Book about Learning Abilities and Learning Disorders*. (For students 11-years-old and below). ISBN- 0-8388-2090-5

Levine, Mel, M.D. 2003. *The Myth of Laziness*. ISBN- 0-7432-1367-X

Salt, J.S. *Always Kiss Me Goodnight. Instructions on Raising the Perfect Parent*. ISBN 0-517-88738-X

OTHERS: