Engaging Families and Increasing Parent Participation: Key Strategies

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Workshop Objectives
» Distinguishing meaningful family engagement strategies.
» Introduction to 4 meaningful strategies for family engagement.
» Introduction to parent engagement resources for ongoing learning.

Meaningful family engagement strategies are PARTNERSHIP DRIVEN and INTENTIONAL.

Partnership Driven
• Based on fundamental belief that parents can contribute as partners
• School challenges (budget, test scores) are made transparent
• Dialogue is two-way
• Goals are shared
• Decision-making power is shared
• Partners’ efforts have impact
Intentional

School personnel are planful about:

- How to connect with and engage the parent population the school serves
- How to create opportunities for parents to participate in a meaningful way
- How to reduce barriers to parents’ participation

Measurable goals for family engagement are set (short term, long term)

THE KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL-FAMILY-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

EPISTEIN’S SIX TYPES OF INVOLVEMENT

**Type 1: Parenting**
- Assist families with parenting and child-rearing skills, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions that support children as students at each age and grade level. Assist schools in understanding families.

**Type 2: Communicating**
- Communicate with families about school programs and student progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications.

**Type 3: Volunteering**
- Improve recruitment, training, work, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and audiences at school or in other locations to support students and school programs.

**Type 4: Learning at Home**
- Involve families with their children in learning activities at home, including homework and other curriculum-related activities and decisions.

**Type 5: Decision Making**
- Include families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy through PTA/PTO, school councils, committees, action teams, and other parent organizations.

**Type 6: Collaborating with Community**
- Coordinate resources and services for students, families, and the school with businesses, agencies, and other groups, and provide services to the community.

Quality Education

Understanding How Parents Decide To Partner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Motivation</th>
<th>Parental Role Construction</th>
<th>Parental Efficacy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do I believe that my involvement will make a difference?</td>
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<td>Do I believe I'm supposed to be involved?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do I believe I need to defend/protect my child's education?</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Invitations</th>
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<tr>
<td>General School Invitation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Specific School Invitations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Specific Child Invitation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do people at the school 'tell' me they want my involvement?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Does the teacher ask me to be involved?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Does my child want or need my involvement?</td>
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<tr>
<td>offer specific requests/suggestions for my involvement?</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Life Context</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge/ Skills and Culture</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time and Energy</td>
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<tr>
<td>-What knowledge they already have</td>
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<tr>
<td>-What kind of involvement they prefer</td>
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<tr>
<td>-Perceptions of appropriate involvement activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence parents' ideas about the involvement activities they can reasonably choose to engage</td>
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</table>

| Specific School Invitations |
| Do the teacher ask me to be involved? |
| offer specific requests/suggestions for my involvement? |

| Specific Child Invitation |
| Does my child/student want or need my involvement? |
Objectification of Families

"Begin challenging your own assumptions. Your assumptions are the windows on the world. Scrub them off every once in a while or the light won’t come in."

- Alan Alda, Connecticut College, 1980

The Teacher Persona

It is important to recognize that teachers' reflections on their life stories as touchstones for their work with students and families flies in the face of much of the scholarly literature on teachers.

That literature describes them as-assumes them to be-neutral, unemotional, and static adults with no interior life, no phantoms from the past, no ambivalence, and no fears. Philosopher Maxine Greene challenges this pervasive view of teachers as a bound up in their professional, rationalistic, and objective straitjackets and urges us to recognize the power of their “personal biographies.”

This narrow conception of teachers, is not only a distortion of the complex, layered lives of teachers both within and outside the classroom, it also limits the repertoire of ways in which they might successfully relate to children and their families, and the range of human qualities and emotions in them that might support communication and rapport with parents.

- Lawrence-Lightfoot, Sara: The Essential Conversation: What parents and teachers can learn from each other, published by The Random House Publishing Group, Copyright 2003
Impact

• Faulty strategies developed based on wrong information
• Low expectations may be expressed
• Limits creativity
• Frustration due to lack of authentic conversations
• Creates an unsafe, unwelcoming environment

Strategy 1: Home Visits

Non academic visits by teacher.

Before important information about academic status can be effectively shared, positive communication must be established and barriers addressed.

THE PARENT/TEACHER HOME VISIT MODEL

Fall—First Visit
Focus: Relationship Building and Listening

Event Invitation
And
Continued School Outreach

Spring—Second Visit
Focus: Capacity Building and Sharing Information
There are three main components to an effective home visit/community meeting:

1. The Call

2. The Visit
   (community meeting)

3. The Follow Up

No.   Item
1.   Set up a new date to train your teachers w/ Community Engagement Office
2.   Establish your lead team that will:
   - Promote home visits
   - Support teachers on coordination home visits
   - Develop/assemble any home visit "kits"
3.   Identify an upcoming school event that you would like to have parents attend and develop flyer.
   At the end of any home visits teachers will extend an invitation to the above please develop flyer.
4.   Revise home visit form template if you intend to use it.
5.   Set up a "home visit challenge!" Challenge all teachers to conduct at least 3 home visits before the event selected on step 3.
6.   If you have chosen to develop a kit that all families will receive, please order your materials ASAP
   Possible items a kit could include:
   - School calendar
   - Teachers contact information
   - Dictionaries
   - Workbooks
   - Videos to support learning at home
   - Educational games
   - Flash cards
   - Graphic organizers
   - Educational video games
   - Books
   - CASHEE/SAT prep books
   - Information on services available at your school
   - Adult Ed. Information
   
   High School Success and California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE)
   
   High school home visits can be broken down in many ways at the high school level.
   
   For example, schools with houses or small learning communities can use those structures to determine which staff will visit which students.
   
   You can also choose to be more strategic, but have to be careful about the "targeting perception". One positive example was to visit the homes of tenth graders who just learned that they did not pass the exit exam on their first attempt. However, the focus was not on the failure but on the possibilities and pathways for success.
Richmond High School

A total of 329 home visits conducted in 10 months. Students selected based on varying criteria. Most home visits lasted 30-60 minutes. Most teachers were suspicious of non academic home visits.

Average number of years working at RHS of teachers was 6 years.

78% of teachers surveyed reported home visits had a strong positive impact on their attitude towards teaching.

Chart #1: Impact of home visits on teacher relationships with parents/guardians and students (percentage of responses) (n=36)

Chart #2: 10th Grade Class Attendance
"Ask yourself this question: what might a school look like that has created a genuine culture of school-family-community partnership, and that has made real progress toward high social and academic achievement for all students?"

Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships

www.pthvp.org

THE PARENT-TEACHER HOME VISIT PROJECT

"INCREASING THE SUCCESS OF ALL STUDENTS—ONE VISIT AT A TIME"

THE PROJECT TEACHES MORE THAN COURSES

- The importance of positive relationships and meaningful engagement
- How to set up a system for ongoing improvement
- How to identify areas for improvement and implement solutions
- How to measure progress and adjust strategies
- How to provide support and resources to families

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BARRIER

Unwelcoming/Confusing School Environment
“Foundational Standards” for Parental Involvement

1. The physical environment
2. School Wide Practices and Policies
3. Welcoming School Staff
4. Written and other media materials

“Getting ready for the party”

The Foundation

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Strategy 2: School Level Family Partnerships

Point Person

Why:
Principals can’t do it alone
All action plans require a point person/s
Key work for point person to help High Schools:
- Support efforts to make pathways from middle/high school to graduation to college/career transparent for families
- Helps provide all families with college/career information
- Facilitate events where students and families engage in "hopes and dreams" discussions and goal-setting processes to plan for future
- Help teachers communicate student progress/concerns to families in a proactive way
- Facilitate/organize workshops/info on: improving study skills, parent-teen communication, problem-solving and decision-making skills and other developmentally appropriate topics
- Engage families in student-led conferences and academic conversations

Pitfalls when no plan is in place
- Additional gate keeper
- Translation and interpretation focus
- Quasi clerk
- Traffic patrol
- Lunch supervision
- Stand in chaperone
- Yard supervisor
- Attendance clerk

Professional Development
- How to engage with parents in 1-1s
- How to deliver effective parenting curriculum
- How to nurture and maintain community partnerships/resources
- How to facilitate meetings
- Clear understanding of core curriculum and academic initiatives
- Planning skills
Principal’s To-dos

- Establish a team
- Develop an action plan
- Meet with point person on a regular basis to review goals
- Develop two-way communication processes that point person can help reinforce with families.

Strategy 3: Family Engagement Teams

- Leverage existing teams (ELAC, PTA, School Site Council) to reduce redundancy
- Review collected data (surveys, etc)
- Consider school challenges and resources
- Establish measurable, achievable annual and quarterly goals
- Make decisions about how to allocate resources and focus strategies

- Effective groups are:
  - multi-disciplinary
  - administrator support, advocacy (and participation)

Strategy 4: Evidence-Based Programs

- Use to target parent-child interactions and/or internal states for parents (e.g., stress management)
- Why do it?
  - Do not have to reinvent the wheel
  - All lessons and materials included
  - Tested in rigorous studies to show that they actually work for what they say they work for

- Reduce one-shot or piecemeal approaches that may alienate or disengage parents
- Stop wasting time and money!!
Challenges to using EBPs

» Expensive

» Require trained staff (MFTs, psychs)

» May require partnering with Community-Based Organizations

Strategy 5: Parent Voice

» Using Surveys in a Two-Way Dialogue

• Surveys are only as valuable as you make them

• A survey is an interview
  - make personal contact to explain purpose

Encourage 100% Survey Participation: What to Stress

• Survey convenience, simplicity, and brevity

• Value and need of data for school community

• The opportunity for parents and staff to communicate confidentially and anonymously their perceptions of school
Making Parent Survey Work

1. Family Engagement Team (FET) considers need for survey.
2. FET selects survey and determines when and how to survey.
3. FET obtains survey materials and meets with parents to encourage 100% participation.
4. FET conducts the survey.
5. FET obtains survey results, shares results with parents, asks for feedback about results.
6. FET makes decisions based on survey results and feedback sessions.
7. FET implements evidence-informed policies, programs, and practices based on survey results.
8. FET reports results of new policies, programs, and practices back to parents.

Ideas for Incentives

- Up to 5% of your S3 budget can be used for incentives.
- Hold contests among homerooms, classes, grade levels, etc. to see who can get the most parent surveys turned in.
- Provide incentives for return (e.g., the parent’s student’s name is entered into a raffle for free prom tickets, free yearbook, free school sweatshirt or hat).

Ideas for Incentives

- Parent.sdsu.edu
- Californiahealthykids.org
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