

Ideas for Schools

Steps Schools Can Take to Involve Parents



Communicate better

At times, parents feel that educators speak in educational jargon they do not understand. School signs often seem unwelcoming. Schools should make every effort to reach out and communicate with parents in a clear way and listen to what they have to say. To ensure that all parents have access to information, written material should be concise, and easily readable. Some school newsletters for parents include a glossary of terms to help parents understand school improvement efforts.

Encourage parental participation in school improvement efforts

When schools develop improvement plans, families ought to be included at every stage of the process to get their input and to give them a sense of shared responsibility. Many schools are now developing such plans. They are working to raise academic standards, improve teaching, make schools safer, introduce computers and other learning technologies into the classroom, and to make many other vitally needed changes. The full involvement of parents and other members of the community is instrumental to the success of these efforts.

Involve parents in decision-making

Schools can give parents a more effective voice by opening up the school governance process so that more parents can participate. Many schools hold evening and weekend meetings to accommodate families' work schedules.

Give teachers the tools to reach out to families

Staff development can help teachers to understand the benefits of family involvement and show them how to remove barriers to involvement. It can also explain techniques for improving two-way communication between home and schools, and suggest ways to help meet families' overall educational needs. Schools should be parent-friendly.

Make parents feel welcome

Often the first time a parent comes to school is when a child is in trouble. Schools can help reduce tensions by making initial contacts with parents friendly and respectful. Schools can also reduce distrust by arranging contacts in neutral settings off school grounds. Home visits by family liaison personnel can be particularly helpful.

Overcome language barriers

Reaching families whose first language is not English requires schools to make special accommodations. Translating materials into a parent's first language helps, but written communication alone is not enough. Ideally, a resource person, perhaps another parent, should be available to communicate with parent communicate with parents in their first language. Interactive telephone voice-mail systems that have bilingual recordings for families are also useful.

Use technology to link parents to the classroom

Educators can creatively use new technology for voice-mail to homework hotlines to educational CD-ROM programs- to get parents more involved in the learning process. Parents and students can call for taped messages that describe classroom activities and daily homework assignments. Audiotapes and videotapes can also be used to enhance communication with parents. These are especially helpful in reaching family members who do not read.

Encourage communities to join school-family partnerships

This can be especially effective in reducing schools safety problems that are connected to problems in surrounding neighborhoods. Parents, community residents, and law enforcement officials can help by joining together in voluntary organizations, friendship networks, and neighborhood watches to solve common problems. Schools and community and religious organizations can help by offering after-school cultural and recreational activities.

The New Jersey State Parent Information and Resource Center

