

Shattering Barriers to Parent Involvement

Strangling budgets and increasingly high expectations are forcing school leaders to confront the reality that no school staff by itself—no matter how dedicated and well-trained—can provide students with everything they need to get a good education today.

As you look ahead to the coming school year, now is the perfect time to make plans to tap the important support and resources that the parents of your students can bring to the task of educating their children.

The good news is that parent support to help boost student learning is available to any school that makes the modest effort required to overcome the barriers that effectively prevent so many parents from getting involved.

Use this list of common barriers—and some ideas for overcoming them—as a starting point for developing strategies to make the coming school year your best ever for parent involvement.

Barrier: *Parents who believe they do not have the ability to help their child do better in school.*

Solution: Ask a few parents you know are having success in helping their children do well in school to participate in a session on parent involvement with other parents. Almost all of them have some technique or idea that works well for them and, given the opportunity, will eagerly share with others. Because parents see other parents as having the highest credibility, the “If I can do it, so can you” effect can be a powerful motivator.

Barrier: *Parents who do not feel that the school invites, welcomes, or encourages their involvement.*

Solution: Work to build and maintain a welcoming and responsive school atmosphere. Keep parents regularly informed about student progress, school requirements, and school events. Encourage all school staff to be respectful and responsive to parents’ questions and suggestions. Use personal, genuine invitations (not simply mass mailings or e-mail) to show parents that you really do want and need their help and value their ideas to help improve student achievement.



Barrier: *Schools that do not provide practical advice to parents about what they can do to help children learn.*

Solution: Parents look to the school for answers about learning issues, so make sure you use your school newsletter and Web site to provide more than just routine announcements. Anticipate questions and concerns parents will

have and provide a steady stream of information and advice. Parents say that one of the main reasons they are not more involved is that they do not know what they should be doing. Good communication and a well-supplied parent resource center are essential.

Barrier: *Schools that fail to alert parents as soon as children begin to have problems.*


Solution: Learning about a child’s problem after it is already too late to do anything about it can justifiably sour parents on school cooperation. Ask teachers, aides, and counselors to make it a priority to keep parents well-informed at the first signs that problems are developing. No one likes being the bearer of bad news, but working together to solve little problems before they become big problems encourages future cooperation.

Barrier: *Lack of true, two-way, respectful partnership communication between parents and school personnel.*

Solution: Parents know their children better than anyone else and can be vitally important school partners if allowed to be. Anne Bouie, a consultant with many years of experience working with parents and schools says, “The answer is to stop treating parents like ‘clients’ and start treating them like ‘partners’ in helping children learn.” That simple attitude can make all the difference.

Barrier: *Parents who feel intimidated by the school—and teachers and other school staff who feel intimidated by parents.*

Solution: Plan programs and activities early in the school year for parents and school staff to get acquainted in social situations, such as back-to-school barbecues, game nights, or other events where participants can step out of their roles as parents or teachers. Getting acquainted before problems arise lays the foundation for working together if problems develop later.

Identifying barriers to parent involvement that exist at your school, and making plans now to overcome them, can help ensure that next year will be your best ever. 

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