Parent Involvement: Turning Up the Heat

Research shows that parent involvement makes a significant difference in children’s achievement, especially during elementary and middle school. Even though the school year is well underway, there is still plenty of time to make this your school’s best year ever for parent involvement. Here are some of the most effective strategies I’ve come across. See which ones you use now—and how many you can adapt to fit your school’s goals.

- Harness the powerful communication network that exists among families. Identify 10 to 12 enthusiastic parents to whom others turn for information. Then go out of your way to keep those key people informed.

- Strengthen or begin using some of these fundamental means of connecting with parents: newsletters; backpack messages; personal notes for the hard-to-reach; convenient parent-teacher conferences; parent orientations; a well-stocked parent resource center; and an open-door policy.

- Include vital updates on the back of the most-read document parents get each month—the school lunch menu.

- Use breakfast and evening meetings to accommodate working parents.

- Make meetings appeal to parents and students. While parents gather, for example, students might watch a movie or have a pizza party. Everyone benefits and parents don’t have to leave children at home.

- Finally, remember that research reveals an excellent way to get parents involved: Ask them to get involved, and tell them what you would like them to do.

- Offer “Just One Hour” parent workshops at varying times of the day and evening. Cover high-priority topics, such as motivation, responsibility, homework, study skills, and encouraging reading. Include helpful handouts.

- In lieu of suspending students for tough discipline problems, consider having parents shadow them for a day. The novelty of having mom or dad present wears off. Parents see difficulties firsthand and quickly become part of the solution.

- Address parents’ concerns about the recent American Academy of Pediatrics study that says TV exposure can be harmful to children and cause future attention problems (www.aap.org/family/tv1.htm). Remind parents of essential TV alternatives, including games, exercise, reading, and studying.

- Have students write invitations to their parents for school activities—in addition to the usual announcements. Children’s notes also get parents’ attention about other happenings.

- Repeat important messages over and over. Studies show that one cause of parent noninvolvement is that messages about involvement don’t sink in. One memo won’t do. Use casual conversations, notes, gatherings, signs, news articles, radio spots, and more—as often as possible.

- Tell parents about the “Never-Fail Read Aloud System” for at-home reading with children. First the parent reads a page and then the child reads a page—all through the book. The magic is in taking turns. Both parents and children love it.

- Offer “How to Communicate with School Staff” programs for families in which language or cultural barriers may be an issue.

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“Every step you take toward increased parent involvement is a step toward student, staff, and school success.”

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For more information on this and other parent-involvement issues, visit www.parent-institute.com.

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