Success for the Asking

As summer rapidly approaches, it’s time to reflect on the most successful elements of your parent involvement program this year and what might be improved for next year. Maybe I can help.

I’d like to share with you the best method I have found to improve parent involvement. It’s a simple-to-use listening approach that costs little or nothing and can be tailored to your unique situation. Over the years, it has provided me with a number of valuable and easily implemented ideas.

What you have to do is to conduct a simple survey.

I am enthusiastic about surveys because after conducting hundreds of local, state, regional, and national surveys over more than 30 years, I have learned three profound lessons about them:

- If you ask people what they think, they will tell you;
- If you pay attention to what they say, you will succeed; and
- If you think you already know what they think, you are probably wrong.

A Mini-Survey That Always Works

Here is a sure-fire, three-question, universal survey you can print in advance and distribute at a moment’s notice to parents, staff, students, or community members about virtually any program, project, or activity at your school.

We Want to Know What You Think!

1. What did you like best about what we did today?
2. How could we have improved it?
3. Other comments?

If you want answers about your parent involvement program, just change the first question to: “What did you like best about our parent involvement program this year?”

“The mini-survey is most effective when it is anonymous and administered immediately after a program or event, while impressions...are fresh in people’s minds.”

Customizing Your Parent Survey

Here are some other questions you might want to address to parents in a mini-survey:

- What are your greatest concerns/worries about helping your child do well in school?
- What is the single most important thing the school and teachers could do to help you help your child do his/her best in school?
- If you had a magic wand and could change anything about our school’s parent involvement program, what changes would you make?

Multiple-Choice Questions

Parents will also respond to mini-surveys like these when you offer several rating choices on a scale ranging from “Very Important” to “Not Important”:

- Please rate the importance of each of the following things we could do to help you help your children do better in school:
- Please rate the importance of each of the following parts of our school’s parent involvement program:
- Please rate how much each of the following parenting topics would help you to help your child succeed in school:

Some Survey Tips

- Be sure to test survey questions on target prospects not involved in creating the survey.
- Remember that short surveys produce more responses.
- Try to include open-ended and multiple-choice questions on one sheet of paper.
- Keep in mind that survey answers are best used to inform your professional judgment, not substitute for it.

I can’t think of a better time than right now to ask your parents, staff, and students about parent involvement at your school. They will appreciate your interest, and you and the school will gain from their insights.

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For More Information

For additional information on this and other parent involvement issues, visit www.parentinstitute.com.
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