



Basic Strategies for Parent Engagement

- 1. Meet and welcome all parents** - It is important to meet and welcome all parents early in the school year. This can be done through neighborhood and community gatherings, during open-house, parent-teacher conferences, or while attending other school-related functions. You may also try sending personalized letters and emails or making phone calls. Create a welcoming environment by making parents and families a priority. Contacting all parents can be quite a challenge, but by making an effort, parents realize that you've taken a personal interest in them and their child which leads to better partnerships throughout the year.
- 2. Provide specific ways parents can contribute** - Parents may want to volunteer at the school, but often are unaware of what they can do or how they can help. Ask your parents what their skills and talents are at the beginning of the year. Also ask about their availability to assist with various projects. Be direct and creative. Then reach out to parents directly with certain projects or tasks that can be completed either at school or at home. When parents are asked to get involved and feel a sense of worth, you are likely to find more parents willing to help.
- 3. Offer a variety of incentives** - Sometimes it takes incentives to get parents in the door. Even during this budget crunched economy, there are still innovative ways to provide incentives for parents. Check with your local supermarkets, restaurants, recreational facilities and/or school partners to see what they can do to help provide incentives free of charge. These companies are often looking for ways to become involved in education and make charitable contributions.
- 4. Recognize positive efforts** - Parents feel a sense of pride when they are recognized for their contributions, big or small. Take time to say thank you, spotlight various parents' efforts throughout the year, or share a token of appreciation. Many parents are unable to be physically present at the school as often as they would like due to work schedules or health problems. Other issues that could be beyond their control are a lack of transportation or childcare. So when you praise their efforts, it compels them want to do more.

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5. **Listen to parent suggestions** – If a parent approaches you with a suggestion for improvement, listen. This will help create a school culture where both positive comments and ways in which the school can improve are shared. Listen and document all forms of comments or suggestions, be sure to address as many of these suggestions as possible. Parents will appreciate the school's effort especially when they see positive changes being made.
6. **Avoid making pre-judgments** – All parents come to school with various life experiences and perspectives. Therefore, be wary about making pre-judgments about your school's parents, because chances are you will make the wrong assumption. Some parents may appear to be uninterested or apathetic about school events, but when you look below the surface, you may find that they are very engaged and active with their child at home. Since this is often the case, seek to provide *all* parents with additional at-home tools that will help their child be successful.
7. **Promote parents as leaders** - The best way to connect with parents at your school is to have other parents serve as catalysts for increasing involvement. When parents see other parents playing an active role in their child's education, they are motivated to do the same. Ensure parents are seen in multiple roles throughout the school building. When parents are seen as partners in school leadership, they feel a sense of ownership and are likely to do more.
8. **Practice cultural competency and sensitivity** – It would be a mistake to take on a one size fits all approach with the parents in your school. Parents come from various lifestyles, ethnicities, and cultural backgrounds. They may be grandparents, foster parents, aunts, uncles, legal guardians or another adult who serves as the primary caregiver of a student. It is important to make sure you consider all parents. By doing this, you will ensure that all parents and students feel included and respected.
9. **Build relationships** – Simply put, parent and community engagement is about building relationships. Nothing else matters if you are ineffective at connecting with parents at your school. The goal in building relationships is to establish a strong foundation for learning and student achievement. Parents are much more likely to collaborate with individuals they believe are genuinely interested in the well-being of their children. At times there will be obstacles to overcome, but it can be done with perseverance and vigilance. Do not be surprised if adjustments need to be made in the strategies, approaches and methods you use but know that this does not equate to failure. Believe in what you do, be passionate about the cause, and know that you are impacting families and making a difference every day by building these relationships.

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- 10. Provide advance notice** - Proper scheduling and advertising is important and necessary to encourage attendance at parent-teacher conferences and other school events. Family life is busy, but by providing parents with adequate notice and information about school functions, you'll increase the odds of better attendance. This is especially true if time off work is needed, job schedule adjustments need to be made, or if childcare is required. Try issuing a monthly school or classroom newsletter highlighting events and special opportunities for parents.
- 11. Expand communication methods** - Parents are busy people and may need to be contacted through several methods of communication. It is necessary to go beyond the traditional route of sending a flyer home with students. You must make an extra effort to inform and communicate with parents in a variety of ways. Some of these methods can include but are not limited to: notes on the school marquee, public service announcements, e-mails, text messages, a message on an automated call-system, posters, personalized notes, invitations, or phone calls. It is also imperative that communications sent home are in all languages represented by your parent population so everyone can be informed.
- 12. Collaborate with others** - Parent and community engagement is not a job that can be done alone. Sometimes you need the help of others to achieve desirable outcomes throughout the school year. At a minimum, make sure you are collaborating with your parent engagement professionals and other teachers at the school. Collaboration takes time, so do not get frustrated if it does not happen immediately. Keep trying and eventually you will see change begin to happen for the benefit of your students and families.
- 13. Link parent engagement efforts to student achievement** - Research shows that when schools and families support each other, students of all backgrounds and abilities achieve at higher levels. However, research is not enough. It is important to continually track meaningful and measurable outcomes to ensure that your parent engagement efforts have a direct link to student achievement. Targeting measurable outcomes is not an easy task but it must be done to show the benefits of parent engagement in education. Learn more about how to successfully wrap school, home, and community engagement around student achievement outcomes by listening to the 360-Degrees of Family Engagement Series conducted by the Georgia Department of Education and Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning.