Promising Practices for Middle and High School Family Engagement

This handout provides a list of promising practices for middle and high school family engagement. When looking at engaging families at the secondary level it is important to develop strategies from an asset building approach as well as keep in mind the National PTA Standards for Family-School Partnerships framework. This list will hopefully provide you with a few ideas to get you started as we begin to address family engagement at the middle and high school levels in a new way…

1. **Involve Parents, Families, and Community Members in Student Assignments and School Work**

- Have students write weekly letters to their parents that include descriptions of work completed in their classes for the week. Make sure students address their favorite new thing learned, where they need more help, and what they mastered. Have parents write back with any comments or follow-up questions they have about the work. If parents need a guide of questions to consider, provide them with a few conversation starters.

  (National PTA Standards: 2 and 3)
  (40 Developmental Asset Subcategories: Support, Boundaries and Expectations, Commitment to Learning, Positive Values, and Social Competence)

- Produce a school wide vocabulary list of terms common to all subject areas that students have struggled with or need to know. Create a brochure inclusive of the terms and their meanings and distribute it to all students. Engage parents by notifying them of the words, highlighting them on the website, posting them in the front office and around the school, including the list in student programs and passing out flyers at athletic events. Provide study tips to families as well and encourage them to use the vocabulary words with their teens.

  (National PTA Standards: 2 and 3)
  (40 Developmental Asset Subcategories: Support, Boundaries and Expectations, Commitment to Learning, and Positive Values)

- Create special assignments for student that require interaction with family members, business owners, and others in the community. For example, in history class have students research the differences in work requirements for jobs that existed 30 years ago and a similar position today. In math class, have students talk to family and friends who are college graduates about the costs of college and then have them create a budget to see how much money they will need to attend. In English class, have students interview family members on a particular topic of their choosing and write it up as it would be published in a magazine or newspaper. Use

student-teacher-family contracts for long term projects so everyone is aware of the role and responsibility they play in completing the project.

(National PTA Standards: 3, 4, and 6)
(40 Developmental Asset Subcategories: Support, Empowerment, Boundaries and Expectations, Commitment to Learning, and Positive Values)

- Promote Family Conversations as an informal way to include parent engagement in education. Send a topic home each week (as well as advertise on the web, through email, and at extracurricular events) as a conversation starter for parents to discuss with their teen. Stress that parents are welcome to converse about anything, but that the topic serves as a guide for parents who struggle with thinking of topics to engage their teen in conversation.

  (National PTA Standards: 2 and 3)
  (40 Developmental Asset Subcategories: Support, Boundaries and Expectations, Commitment to Learning, Positive Values, and Social Competence)

- Develop family and student journals that are completed each week. Assign students a question to answer and ask parents to answer the same question too! For example, who do you admire most and why? Then have parents and students share their answers with one another and have students record their impressions of the conversation.

  (National PTA Standards: 2 and 3)
  (40 Developmental Asset Subcategories: Support, Boundaries and Expectations, Commitment to Learning, Positive Values, and Social Competence)

2. **<u>Provide Opportunities for Parent to Learn Information on What They Can Do to Influence Their Teen's Learning and Overall Success</u>**

- Hold Parent Universities, Parent Chats, or Parent Meetings to inform parents and families of various ways they can influence and be a part of their teen's education. Present issues that are important to your school community and offer these opportunities at various times and places. Partner with community resources to reach various parent populations. Create Parent Huddles during the meeting, after a large presentation or keynote to make a larger school seem smaller and allow parents to engage in meaningful conversations with one another around selected topics of interest. Some topics for meetings may include:
  - Learning the 40 Developmental Assets and Learning Ways to Develop Them In Your Teen
  - How Well Do You Know Your Teen: Effective Communication
  - Using Technology in Education

- What to Expect From Your Teen Throughout Adolescence
- Positive Discipline Strategies and Consequences
- Supporting Your Teen Through a Crisis
- Teen Driving Safety
- Are Everyone Else's Parents REALLY Letting Them Do That?
- Student Safety and School Bullying
- Staying In Communication with the School
- Gang Awareness
- Understanding Academic Options, Graduation Requirements, and Testing
- Financing Postsecondary Education and Applying for Financial Aid
- College and Career: What are my Teen's Options?
- Unlocking Your Teen's Potential – Exploring the Behavior of Underachievement.
- Teaching Your Middle School Student Organization
- Data Interpretation: AYP, GHSGT, EOCT, ETC…

(National PTA Standards: 2, 3, 4, and 6)
(40 Developmental Asset Subcategories: Support, Empowerment, Boundaries and Expectations, Commitment to Learning, Positive Values, and Social Competence)

- Encourage parents to regularly review their teen's complete schedule,inclusive of classes and extracurricular activities. Provide them with strategies to help their students take responsibility for their learning and understand the importance of setting priorities. Teach families active listening skills and to be supportive of activities their teen really likes.

  (National PTA Standards: 2, and 3)
  (40 Developmental Asset Subcategories: Support, Boundaries and Expectations, Commitment to Learning, Positive Values, and Social Competence)

- Hold evening study groups where parents can examine and discuss the same educational issues as teachers and administrators such as integrated curriculum, college and career counseling, differentiated learning. Ask their opinions on the topics. If there is a lot of interest around a certain area, consider starting a book club or other learning opportunity for families to learn more.

  (National PTA Standards: 2, 3, 4, and 5)
  (40 Developmental Asset Subcategories: Support, Boundaries and Expectations, and Commitment to Learning)

- Find ways to inform families about curriculum, school activities, and other student learning by allowing families to "Take School Home" through checking out videos, DVDs or even posting POD Casts. Create videos on core academic areas and electives as well as navigating the school. Take parents on a virtual school tour where they meet teachers; learn of course offerings, graduation requirements, and much more! If needed, do the videos in various languages and use students to produce in a video production class. Also, if possible post the videos on your school website and advertise in various ways that the videos are available.

  (National PTA Standards: 2 and 3)
  (40 Developmental Asset Subcategories: Support, Boundaries and Expectations, and Commitment to Learning)

- Talk with parents about the power of setting high expectations for their teen and provide various ways they talk with their teen on a regular basis to find out what is happening in school and their teen's social life.

  (National PTA Standards: 2 and 3)
  (40 Developmental Asset Subcategories: Support, Boundaries and Expectations, Commitment to Learning, Positive Values, and Social Competence)

- Create a Parent Organization that works in partnership with the school's parent engagement priorities. To increase membership and attendance, advertise the meetings as school outreach meetings and hold them multiple times throughout various locations in the school community. Have school administrators attend and plan an engaging agenda that consists of presentations about important school curriculum and contact information. Then add a unique element by splitting parents into small groups based on personal interests around middle and high school topics.

  (National PTA Standards: 2, 3, 4, and 5)
  (40 Developmental Asset Subcategories: Support, Boundaries and Expectations, and Commitment to Learning)

- Hold Parent/Family Report Card Pick Up Nights that require parents to personally pick up their teen's report card. Have a different theme or workshop each time and have teachers and school staff on hand to speak with parents about their student's grades and what they can do to continue to facilitate the learning process. Make a list of those students who need the most attention and personally reach out to their families to attend. For parents who can't attend that night, offer a few other times when they can pick up the report card or make other arrangements.

  (National PTA Standards: 1, 2, and 3)
  (40 Developmental Asset Subcategories: Support, Boundaries and Expectations, and Commitment to Learning)

3. Make School Transitions Opportunities for Family Engagement

- Have college transition become a school and community tradition. Hold a picnic or celebration at the end of every school year to send off new graduates. Invite rising juniors and seniors and their families to attend, as well, and include information for them on college and career paths and preparing for what is next. Then, around the winter holidays invite recent graduates back to school for a roundtable discussion to share the experiences they had during their first post-secondary fall with students and their parents.

  (National PTA Standards: 1, 2, 3, and 6)
  (40 Developmental Asset Subcategories: Support, Empowerment, Boundaries and Expectations, Commitment to Learning, Positive Values, Social Competence, and Positive Identity)

- Hold a Freshman Academy Parent Support and Leadership Development Program for families the year that their teen enters 9th grade. Hold hour long breakfast or evening meetings October through May and cover topics such as on-time graduation, goal setting, community opportunities, extracurricular activities, family engagement opportunities, job exploration, academic expectations, and making the most of your high school career. This could also easily be replicated for 6th grade parents.

  (National PTA Standards: 1, 2, and 3)
  (40 Developmental Asset Subcategories: Support, Boundaries and Expectations, Commitment to Learning, Positive Values, and Social Competence)

- Have a series of Step-Up Nights for students and their families in the spring leading up to the summer before they move to their new schools. Hold information sessions on various topics such as what to expect, course offerings, extracurricular activity options, teen development, graduation requirements, planning for college and career, and definitions and expectations for family engagement. Have a mix of sessions both at the student's current school and the school they will be transitioning to next year. Offer tours and also incorporate a mix of students who already attend the middle or high school to provide presentations and share experiences.

  (National PTA Standards: 1, 2, and 3)
  (40 Developmental Asset Subcategories: Support, Boundaries and Expectations, Commitment to Learning, Positive Values, and Social Competence)

- Host a series of College and Career nights for students and families. Have college students or young professionals in the community lead discussions. Allow students and their families to explore various careers by working with community organizations and local businesses to

share information about what they do, as well as offer job shadowing and job exploration opportunities. Incorporate college and career planning tools, as well as small group discussions.

(National PTA Standards: 1, 2, 3, and 6)
(40 Developmental Asset Subcategories: Support, Empowerment, Boundaries and Expectations, Commitment to Learning, Positive Values, and Social Competence)

- Offer opportunities for students and families to sign up and shadow other students during the school day to experience a typical day in middle or high school. Have separate sessions for students and parents so students can have some time exploring on their own as well.

(National PTA Standards: 1, 2, and 3)
(40 Developmental Asset Subcategories: Support, Boundaries and Expectations, Commitment to Learning, and Positive Identity)

4. <u>Actively Engage Students, Families, and Communities Together</u>

- Hold monthly Family Nights where parents are invited into the classroom to learn and actually try the work their teens are doing. Have students teach the class, reinforcing the material they have learned, and also assign homework to their parents that they will grade.

(National PTA Standards: 1, 2, and 3)
(40 Developmental Asset Subcategories: Support, Boundaries and Expectations, Commitment to Learning, Positive Values, Social Competence, and Positive Identity)

- Have public exhibitions of student work to formally present their best work to the community. Install them in public places that are outside of the school or during already scheduled community events. Have teens present their exhibition at a particular time during the event or at least be on hand to answer questions or speak to family and community members.

(National PTA Standards: 3 and 6)
(40 Developmental Asset Subcategories: Support, Empowerment, Commitment to Learning, and Positive Identity)

- Provide opportunities and encourage parents to volunteer to participate in community service projects with their teens.

(National PTA Standards: 3, 4, and 6)
(40 Developmental Asset Subcategories: Support, Empowerment, Boundaries and Expectations, Constructive Use of Time, Positive Values, Social Competence and Positive Identity)

- Practice and hold student-led parent – teacher conferences or advisement meetings. Use this time to involve both parents and students in class selection based on the student's study habits and interests. Also engage in setting student goals for the year or planning for postsecondary education or careers. Have both the student and the teacher write invitations to the parent personally inviting them to attend.

  (National PTA Standards: 2 and 3)
  (40 Developmental Asset Subcategories: Support, Boundaries and Expectations, Commitment to Learning, Positive Values, Social Competence and Positive Identity)

- Hold Parent-Student Nights or weekend events that cover important topics of interest to teens and families such as teen driving laws, making positive choices, the importance of developing assets, what does my future hold, and other interesting subjects. Then engage students and parents in dialogue together.

  (National PTA Standards: 2, 3, 4, and 6)
  (40 Developmental Asset Subcategories: Support, Empowerment, Boundaries and Expectations, Commitment to Learning, Positive Values, Social Competence and Positive Identity)

- Involve middle and high school students (and not just the students on the student council) in the design of their school's parent outreach program. Ask them how they want their families to be involved and encourage them to think outside of the box.

  (National PTA Standards: 1, 2, and 3)
  (40 Developmental Asset Subcategories: Support, Empowerment, Constructive Use of Time, Commitment to Learning, Positive Values, Social Competence and Positive Identity)

- Organize a curriculum showcase that includes a diverse collection of displays and interactive events to highlight academics and share what students are learning with their families. Include academic projects, history reenactments, career, technical, and agricultural demonstrations, or art projects from diverse groups of students. Also, invite student groups/clubs, community organizations, and local businesses to share and provide information.

  (National PTA Standards: 1, 2, 3, and 6)
  (40 Developmental Asset Subcategories: Support, Empowerment, Boundaries and Expectations, Constructive Use of Time, Commitment to Learning, Positive Values, Social Competence, and Positive Identity)

- Hold a variety of different themed academic nights that engage both students and their parents/guardians in active learning. Have students write letters of invitation to their families

and use students to help plan the event so they want to be there with their parents. Some event topics may include:

- Parent- Teen Book Club Discussion Nights
- Family Game Nights (incorporating math, reading, arts, and thinking skills)
- Real-life Science Night with various activity stations revolving around earth, physics, life, chemistry or environmental science
- Sports Math Night using real football statistics
- A Night of Evening Advisement (Oscars Style) where students and parents have class selections, review student records, evaluate test scores, and choose extracurricular activities. Throughout the night have students and parents walk the red carpet and win awards for taking a step in the right direction towards graduation.

(National PTA Standards: 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6)
(40 Developmental Asset Subcategories: Support, Boundaries and Expectations, Commitment to Learning, Positive Values, Social Competence, and Positive Identity)

- Help families arrange to hold study groups for high school and middle school children within their neighborhoods or communities to work on special projects or difficult homework assignments.

(National PTA Standards: 3, 4, 5, and 6)
(40 Developmental Asset Subcategories: Support, Empowerment, Boundaries and Expectations, Commitment to Learning, Positive Values, and Social Competence)

- Ask parents and students to be spokespersons in community groups, faith based organizations, civic clubs, and neighborhood associations about school events and other opportunities to support teens in the community (support, empowerment, positive identity, commitment to learning).

(National PTA Standards: 4, 5, and 6)
(40 Developmental Asset Subcategories: Support, Empowerment, Boundaries and Expectations, Constructive Use of Time, Commitment to Learning, Positive Values, Social Competence, and Positive Identity)

- Invite and actively seek parents to share experiences and information from their job or culture, demonstrate specific skills from work or hobbies, or talk about how what students are learning in school relates to the world of work.

(National PTA Standards: 1, 2, 3, and 4)

(40 Developmental Asset Subcategories: Support, Boundaries and Expectations, Commitment to Learning, Positive Values, and Social Competence)

5. **<u>Ensure All Families are Welcomed and Valued as Part of the School Community</u>**

- Personally reach out to incoming and new students and their families by providing welcome packets, a personal phone call from a school faculty or staff member, and tours of the school by parent volunteers, students, or staff.

  (National PTA Standards: 1 and 2)
  (40 Developmental Asset Subcategories: Support, Boundaries and Expectations, and Commitment to Learning)

- Organize Parent Days to occur a few times throughout the year during which there are scheduled times where parents can spend all day or part of the day with their teen in school following their schedule. Create a theme for these days such as "Look What Is Happening Here!" and include invitations to the community as well. This will foster open communication and expose parents to what there teen is learning. (Support, Commitment to Learning, Positive Identity)

  (National PTA Standards: 1, 2, 3, and 6)
  (40 Developmental Asset Subcategories: Support, Boundaries and Expectations, and Commitment to Learning)

- Use various techniques to improve school-to-home communications. Train faculty and staff on creating interactive web pages that require information such as a brief biography, course descriptions, course outlines, required materials, requests for volunteers, and upcoming assignments. Also, invest in software that enables teachers to automatically send emails to parents on a weekly basis with a personal greeting along with their student's current academic grades and progress. For those families without access to the internet, send monthly newsletters and provide teachers with stamped postcards so they can easily send quick good news notes home about a student's recent success.

  (National PTA Standards: 1 and 2)
  (40 Developmental Asset Subcategories: Support, Boundaries and Expectations, and Commitment to Learning)

- Systematically seek and gather all parent ideas, perspectives, opinions, and questions about school-family partnership roles in unique and various ways. Involve them in the decision making process and focus on getting to your school's most isolated parents.

  (National PTA Standards: 1, 2, and 5)
  (40 Developmental Asset Subcategories: Support, Boundaries and Expectations, Commitment to Learning, Positive Values, and Positive Identity)

- Schedule a school staff professional development session/opportunity that takes school faculty and staff on a bus tour into the neighborhoods of the students who attend the school. After the trip, have a discussion about what everyone saw, the impression it had on them, and what the school can do to work to address barriers to student and family engagement in he community visited.

  (National PTA Standard: 1)
  (40 Developmental Asset Subcategories: Support, Empowerment, Boundaries and Expectations, Commitment to Learning, and Positive Values)

- Hold town hall meetings at multiple times throughout the year in various locations such as the school, subdivision clubhouses, neighborhood community centers, faith based organizations, civic centers, and apartment complex gathering rooms. Have the principal talk about the school schedule, what students and families should expect, current curriculum, and provide ways for families to be engaged in their teen's schooling. Also, include time to take questions and answers from the audience and engage in meaningful conversation.

  (National PTA Standards: 1, 2, 5, and 6)
  (40 Developmental Asset Subcategories: Support, Empowerment, Commitment to Learning, Positive Values, and Social Competence)

- Identify students, from report cards and progress reports, who could benefit from receiving more attention than what is already being provided by the school, and personally reach out to them and their families in unique ways. For example, hold a community outreach dinner off school grounds for groups of these families and invite a select group of teachers and administrators to each one. Make the event an informal affair and use the time to share ideas with students and parents and hear parents' views and concerns. Have teachers and school staff donate or prepare food, have a potluck, or collaborate with a community partner to donate their services.

  (National PTA Standards: 1, 2, 4, and 6)
  (40 Developmental Asset Subcategories: Support, Empowerment, Boundaries and Expectations, Commitment to Learning, Positive Values, and Social Competence)

- Allow family engagement professionals or those responsible for family engagement at the school to tour local public service organizations or agencies such as the unemployment office, health clinics, social services and food pantries so they know of the resources available and can provide referral assistance to families when needed.
  (National PTA Standards: 1 and 6)

(40 Developmental Asset Subcategories: Support, Boundaries and Expectations, Positive Values, and Social Competence)

- Give parents specific information on how their services or talents can be directly utilized by volunteering at the school. Some examples may include asking parents to serve as morning greeters or guides in the school, helping out in the front office, cafeteria, or library, seeking help from community partners, or serving as a hall monitor. Also, be sure to expand upon the traditional definition of family engagement so families also understand the wide range of activities available, such as talking about the value of education, communicating with teachers, and discussing the school day.

  (National PTA Standards: 1,2, and 3)
  (40 Developmental Asset Subcategories: Support, Boundaries and Expectations Commitment to Learning, Positive Values, and Social Competence)

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The National PTA Family-School Partnerships can be obtained from:
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