Star Wars Activity
Staff Training on Parent Engagement

Shared by Cassie Milligan (PISC @ Central Gwinnett High School)

This is based on the article "What "Star Wars" Can Teach Educators About Parent Engagement." The link to the article is below.
http://www.edweek.org/tm/articles/2011/02/23/tln_starwars.html?tkn=VOWFpPE2y2cfbRqlnVIy/FSp4uvSXDUlq/z0&cmp=clp-edweek

Basic Instructions for the Activity:

1) Have the teachers in small groups.

2) Introduce some basic information about "Star Wars". What do they know? Did they know that Leia is someone we should imitate? (Have the Star Wars theme playing and a campy pic of Leia up on the screen when the teachers entered.)

3) Give each group one of each of the four LEIA Approach sheets that ask them to identify each of the components of the LEIA APPROACH by reading the examples of Leia's actions.

4) The first group to identify the 4 parts of the LEIA APPROACH wins treats (Mars Bars, Starburst, Milky Way, Star Crunchers - Little Debbie - basically anything with a "star" theme).

5) Each group is then given one of the letters (L, E, I , or A) and asked to discuss in the small group how this quality can be used in communicating with parents.

6) Each group is then given an answer sheet (based on the article) containing information on the letter that they received. They are to use this in their discussion to help them think about how the quality can be used with parents. The small groups then report back to the larger group.

7) The ticket out the door was for them to fill out the "What Can Princess Leia Teach Us About Parent Engagement?" review sheet with what each of the letters stand for and how the teacher plans to better implement the quality in communicating with parents.

Everyone seemed to like the Star Wars activity. (Too bad it's really only good for doing one time.)

This activity takes about 40 minutes.

What can Princess Leia teach us about parent engagement?

The "LEIA" Approach to Parent Engagement

"L" is for _____

"E" is For _____

"I" is for _____

"A" is for _____

May the force **of genuine parent engagement** ***be with you.***

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"L"

In "Return of the Jedi," the princess follows Luke when he leaves the gathering of Ewoks, who are awed by C-3PO's stories of adventure. When Leia catches up, she is clearly present and attentive as Luke reveals their true relationship—as brother and sister. She doesn't jump in or interrupt. She understands his need to say what's on his mind, and she knows there will be time to ask questions later.

What does the "L" in the LEIA Approach stand for?

How can educators imitate Leia when communicating with parents?

Excerpt from article "***What Star Wars Can Teach Educators About Parent Engagement***" by Larry Ferlazzo
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"E"

In "Star Wars," Leia understands Luke's grief after Darth Vader kills his mentor, Obi-Wan Kenobi, and she knows what he needs to hear—words she likely draws from her own experience of grief. "There was nothing you could have done," she says. She doesn't immediately tell him to just get over it and start planning what to do next.

What does the "E" in the LEIA Approach stand for?

How can educators imitate Leia when communicating with parents?

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"I"

When the Admiral of the Death Star in "Star Wars" threatens to destroy Leia's home world if she doesn't tell him where the rebel base is hidden, it's clear that the princess is vividly imagining the pain and loss her people will experience if she fails to reveal the information.

What does the "I" in the LEIA Approach stand for?

How can educators imitate Leia when communicating with parents?

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"A"

In "Star Wars," the princess is often seen guiding action by asking the right questions. Think back again to the scene with Luke—he would never have volunteered the truth about Vadar if Leia hadn't asked, gently but directly, what was bothering him.

What does the "A" in the LEIA Approach stand for?

How can educators imitate Leia when communicating with parents?

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"L" is for Listening

When we teachers are meeting with parents, we may feel the urge to fill up the conversational space with our thoughts and concerns; but if we are talking more than 50 percent of the time, we're leading with our "mouths" instead of our "ears." That's not the way genuine and fruitful relationships are built. Conversations need to be an exchange of views and information, not a one-sided lecture. Knowing what is going on in the lives of students and families is critical to us becoming more effective teachers.

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"E" is for Empathy

When teachers are meeting with parents, we often come with an action agenda: specific ideas of what we believe should happen—now! Because we are so busy, these meetings often don't occur until problems have reached a critical point. But showing our empathy can go a long way in demonstrating our own humanity and, subsequently, making parents more open to hearing our ideas about what might be done. All of us have been children ourselves. Some of us have children of our own, or we're close to children in our extended families. Certainly, out of that wealth of "background knowledge," we can share a story or two that shows we understand the challenges parents face every day.

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"I" is Imagining

When we meet with parents, we need to use our own imaginations to put ourselves in their position—to imagine their hopes and their vulnerability. We need to visualize ourselves sitting there, waiting to hear what the teacher is about to say about our child. What words can we choose—what attitude can we take—to strengthen the sense that we're in this together and will join forces to help this young person succeed?

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"A" is for Asking

When we teachers are meeting with parents, asking the right questions can be our most effective tool. Not only can we learn what is going on in the home, but we can also hear about the times when their child has been most successful—in school or out. What energizes them at home? What teachers in the past did their child like the best and why? What, if anything, do they come home from school excited about?

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