

Parental Involvement

Hi all,

Whether you attended one of my sessions on this topic, or one where Debbie Silver and I present together, I think these notes will be helpful. Many ideas come from Debbie's work on the topic, some from mine, and many ideas from educators around the country.

Warning: these are simply notes – not a well crafted book!

Questions?

Just send us an email!

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We can all recognize that many people express concerns (whine?) about the lack of parental involvement at school. I try to encourage educators to put their energies toward solving problems associated with effectively involving parents. There ARE schools finding success with their parent involvement efforts. In recent years, 44% or 83.9 million people chose to volunteer in the USA. Be optimistic!

DOES PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT HAVE TO MEAN COMING TO SCHOOL?

Keep in mind that many parents would rather not spend any extra time they may have at school. Principals might consider having "parent information" sessions in neighborhood locations...go to their "turf". Email classroom info to parents at home or work (if appropriate). Allow parents who only have time to help on a Sunday evening to take home items that could help in your classroom (cutting out art projects?). Be creative - or ask a parent volunteer to help you identify how other parents could be involved.

In the song **THE OFFICE CALL**, I try to point out that sometimes the only view of parents is as "complainers". I wrote the song **QUESTIONS** to say that even those of us who are experienced as professional educators can still have many questions when it is OUR child in your care.... Finally, if you need to convince others that parental involvement can make a difference, listen to the song **MORE HANDS**, and then share the research below. It's a start....

First, know your PURPOSE for involving parents. Do you want them in the building to simply raise their awareness? Do you want them to help model behavior in the classroom? Do you want them to help with sports, music, or academic fund raising? Do you want them involved in the classroom? Test review and preparation?

If you attended my session where I described the MONDAY MORNING ADVISORY TIME, you might remember it was run by parents in the classroom and we had significant, weekly staff development time. All students did the same thing: watch channel one, silent sustained reading, check their agenda, and go over announcements. For more details, please contact me and we'll talk on the phone. It is a long explanation for these notes!

What does the research say?

Linking Parent Involvement to Student Achievement

By: John H. Wherry, president of The Parent Institute in Fairfax, Virginia.

In- *Principal Journal* May/June 2003 Wherry says:

- Current research can be found at: *A New Wave of Evidence: Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement*, written by Anne T. Henderson and Karen L. Mapp (Southwest Educational Development Laboratory 2002). The complete 235-page report is available online at www.sedl.org/connections.
- Students with involved parents, no matter what the parents' education or background, are more likely to have better attendance records, earn higher grades and test scores, and have better social skills than those whose parents are not involved.
- An analysis of 25 research studies reveals that students with above-median parent involvement show academic achievement rates 30 percents higher than students with below-median parent involvement.
- In schools where teachers reported high levels of outreach to parents, test scores grew at a rate 40 percent higher than in schools where teachers reported low levels of outreach.
- A study of 704 low-income parents of Chicago eighth graders showed that students whose parents were frequently involved were 38 percent less likely to be held back in school.
- Research has shown that students spend 87 percent of their waking time outside school in their parents' charge. How parents direct this time can have major effects on student achievement.
- In one study, students making the transition to middle school reported that parent involvement (with homework, school events, volunteering, and discussion of school activities) was particularly helpful.
- Effective parent involvement programs emphasize parent/school/community collaboration, engaging families and students in developing specific knowledge and skills, participation at school and at home, appreciation of diversity, and welcoming outreach to parents.

AGAIN, know thy PURPOSE. When your staff at school talks about increasing parental involvement, be sure and ask them “what is our purpose in involving parents?”. In other words – know what you WANT, before determining what you will DO. You said:

- Increase parental involvement
- Improve Positive parental involvement.
- Change perception of kids regarding whether or not they want their parents to be there.
- Decrease some parents’ OVER-involvement.
- Engage low socio-economic families (and try to identify specific things parents can help with at school, even if their own skills are poor).

Debbie Silver and I ask “WHY DO PARENTS AVOID SCHOOL?” You Said:

- They may have grown up in families devoid of good parenting skills. They have experienced no models of effective parenting themselves. They may not be sure how to do it even if they want to.
- They may have had a very negative school experience themselves. They may be hostile and bitter about how they believe they were treated, and they are ready to project those perceived injustices onto you.
- They may doubt their own literacy or academic skills. They are unwilling to put themselves in a position to look foolish or ignorant.
- They may be totally overwhelmed by situations outside of school. Lack of money and resources, problems with other children, dysfunctional relationships, job stresses, difficulties with the law, illness, and other pressures can leave a parent feeling disoriented and disenfranchised.
- They may speak little or no English.
- They may come from a different culture and are intimidated by the unfamiliar customs and protocols at your school.
- They may feel hopeless and/or powerless. Some parents have become so disillusioned with their realities that they feel that nothing they do makes any difference.
- They may be unable to attend school functions because of job responsibilities, the demands of younger children, obligations to elderly relatives, or lack of transportation.
- Over scheduled
- Have had bad experiences
- Not welcome
- Bored
- Intimidated
- Kids say “don’t come to school”
- Transportation is a problem
- Single Parents lack time
- Too many responsibilities

- Afraid of bad news
- Language barriers
- Disabilities
- Afraid their child will act out
- Don't know what to expect
- Don't know it's important
- Nothing to do when they volunteer
- Other parents are intimidating
- They are working (same reason most teachers can't volunteer in their own child's classroom!)
- Concerns about their clothing
- Not asked
- Teacher/Principal Attitudes
- Lack of Information
- Don't Care

We ask “WHAT WORKS TO GET PARENTS TO SCHOOL?” You Said:

- Whenever possible, keep parental involvement PARENT driven. Allow parent volunteers to help support the parent involvement efforts! For instance, if parents sign up at enrollment so your school has a list of who has expertise in certain areas (but no one asks the parents to really use that expertise)...teachers can use their parent volunteer to use the parent resource list to involve parents. Many times, teachers don't have time to seek out parents. Let a parent help involve other parents.
- Have the first parent teacher conference occur before school starts so that parents have the “voice” – let them talk about what they think will help their child succeed.
- Make a good phone call home.
- Show videos at Walmart that highlight your school's successes and options for parents to be involved.
- Have a booth at the grocery store.
- Muffins for Mom – sits with students for 10 minutes
- Doughnuts for Dads – they come attend with students.
- Gallop Day (shadow children).
- Offer Life-Style training.
- “Drop the Thought and Leave the Room”
- Locate the book by Jack Berckemeyer and Patti Kinney at NMSA.org and NAESP.org.
- Do a group book study on “Mean Girls”
- Have a Literacy Lock-in
- Have a Ladies Night Out
- Be specific about the task and ask parents to come

- Have parent volunteers send positive notes for the teacher when students have a success (mail/email/call) or email individual student digital photos of classroom happenings to that parent.
- Provide child care.
- Parent Tea – train the parents for centers in the classroom.
- Link parents of younger students in the school with more experienced parents.
- Parent University
- Allow parents to set up labs
- Monitor labs
- Research topics for teachers
- Newsletter/Graphics/Photos
- Student lead conferences bring parents to school
- Let parents provide after-school homework help
- Run the “accelerated reader” store
- Set up for dances
- Run copies, file, sort, hole punch, etc. Help with secretarial chores
- Parents can help provide hallway supervision
- Ladies night out – an evening for moms (child care provided)
- Dinner with door prizes
- Career Day- Parents share their career
- Parents walk through student schedule during “parent night”
- Parents organize a lock-in read-a-thon
- Awards ceremony
- MAP test supervision
- Supervise release time so teachers can work
- Help in library
- Parents help with clubs
- Career day for parents
- Ask parents what they want/can do

AS A CLASSROOM TEACHER, WHAT ARE SOME OF MY ROUTINE BEHAVIORS (DAILY OR WEEKLY) THAT A PARENT COULD DO?

- Take digital photos of successful students and email to the parent.
- Take videos of successful activities to use at “parent night” , etc.
- Supervise lunch or before/after school supervisions.
- Take students for extra activities – like to/from library, lunch, outdoor observations, etc.
- Organize the classroom library.
- Become the class webmaster.
- Read to, or be read to.
- Check each student’s weekly planner.
- File, photocopy, laminate, organize book orders, magazine sale info,
- Call other parents with successes; organize guest speakers, set up special events.

WHAT CAN OCCUR AT STAFF MEETINGS TO PREPARE FOR IMPROVED PARENT INVOLVEMENT?

Do a little research and talk about the benefits of parental involvement.

Allow staff to talk about their concerns and help solve those problems.

Allow the staff to brainstorm WHAT parents will do when they come to school, or more specifically, to the classroom. Teachers can map out specific plans for how to involve a parent who has 1 hour of time to help in a classroom.

Allow the staff to do a think/pair/share activity based on the question: “what does a great parent/teacher conference look like?” Also ask, “As a parent, what do you really want to know about your child at a P/T conference.”

Ask teachers to write down how they could help another teacher if they were simply volunteering once a week. Many parents are highly qualified to be helpful with student learning. Most volunteers want to do more than run copies or file papers.

OTHER THOUGHTS?

Make the first move. Invite parents to a back-to-school event – before there are problems. Some districts conduct their first parent-teacher conference BEFORE the first day of school. Parents have an opportunity to inform, rather than respond.

Take photos and make videos that display students enjoying great learning activities, that portray parents at school, and that convey an open environment for parents.

When staff development (such as tech training) can include parents, make an effort to offer them a chance to learn, or use their expertise to help train.

Recognize parents who are leaders by giving them responsibility. They may do a better job than you (and you don’t have time!).

Again, respect a parent’s time. They will not continue to volunteer if they do not feel their time has been useful.

Question- “How do you offer parents advice for things they should be doing at home?”

-Include things in newsletter such as make sure your child gets plenty of sleep because we have a test on Tuesday. Also use www.naesp.org for resources – national association of elementary school principals.

*Idea- sometimes meet parents outside of school (for coffee, pizza, etc).

The National PTA

In their National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs the National Parent Teacher Association (1997) cites research that clearly indicates:

1. When parents are involved, students achieve more, regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnic/racial background, or the parents' education level.
2. The more extensive the parent involvement, the higher the student achievement.
3. When parents are involved, students exhibit more positive attitudes and behavior.
4. Children from diverse cultural backgrounds tend to do better when parents and professionals collaborate to bridge the gap between the culture at home and the learning institution.
5. Secondary students whose parents remain involved make better transitions, maintain the quality of their work, and develop realistic plans for their future. Students whose parents are not involved are more likely to drop out.
6. The most accurate predictor of a student's achievement in school is not income or social status, but the extent to which that student's family is able to:
 - a) create a home environment that encourages learning.
 - b) communicate high, yet reasonable expectations for their children's achievement and future careers
 - c) become involved in their children's education at school and in the community.

REASONS WHY PARENTS OFTEN AVOID SCHOOL

1. They may have grown up in families devoid of good parenting skills. They have experienced no models of effective parenting themselves. They may not be sure how to do it even if they want to.
2. They may have had a very negative school experience themselves. They may be hostile and bitter about how they believe they were treated; and they are ready to project those perceived injustices onto you.
3. They may doubt their own literacy or academic skills. They are unwilling to put themselves in a position to look foolish or ignorant.
4. They may be totally overwhelmed by situations outside of school. Lack of money and resources, problems with other children, dysfunctional relationships, job stresses, difficulties with the law, illness, and other pressures can leave a parent feeling disoriented and disenfranchised.
5. They may speak little or no English.
6. They may come from a different culture and are intimidated by the unfamiliar customs and protocols at your school.
7. They may feel hopeless and/or powerless. Some parents have become so disillusioned with their realities that they feel that nothing they do makes any difference.
8. They may be unable to attend school functions because of job responsibilities, the demands of younger children, obligations to elderly relatives, or lack of transportation.

Beginning Communication With Parents

- Start early. Before school starts or on the first day of school make a contact with the parents. Introduce yourself with a letter, and let them know that you want to work with them to help their child have the best year possible. Be friendly, be professional, be inviting, and be sure you use correct grammar and punctuation on all written communications! You may want to use a fun font or clip art to make your letter seem less officious. Give them your contact information, and invite them to use it.
- Give the parents enough of an overview of your plans and expectations that they can see you know what you are doing.
- Provide a translation for parents who have limited use of English.
- Let them know how important they are in the ultimate success of their children's lives. Always demonstrate respect for the family and the family's primary role in helping students become responsible adults.
- Make the first move. Do not wait for parent to contact you. If you care about what happens to your students, you have to involve yourself with their parents.

Top 10 Ways to Keep in Touch With Parents

- Phone
 - E-mail
 - Voice mail
 - Fax
 - Web site (school or class)
 - Personal contacts
 - Newsletters
 - Academic calendar
 - News bulletins/community bulletin boards
 - Notes and cards (if all else fails, send them a registered letter.)
- Make your first contact a positive one!

Positive Parental Involvement

Form Proactive Partnerships With Parents:

- Have family inventory sheets filled out
- Send home copies of class policies, standards, procedures, etc.
- Send home newsletters (with pictures!)
- Call or send letters with good news as often as possible

During a Parent Conference:

- Be warm, be friendly, and be assertive
- Utilize good listening and interpersonal communication skills
- Refuse to be defense
- Stick to the subject
- Admit your mistakes
- Establish a common ground

NEVER gossip with or about parents!

Involve Parents as much as possible!

How to Handle an Upset Parent

- Keep your voice calm; lower your tone and slow your speech.
- If meeting in person, treat parents as guests. Offer them a cold drink or a cup of coffee. Try to make the parent(s) feel as comfortable as possible.
- Remain in control. Be sympathetic and empathetic, but NOT defensive.
- Really listen to the other person. Practice active listening skills. Let them “get it all out” without interrupting or commenting. Take notes if you need to. Acknowledge the other person’s frustration, anger, and/or pain.
- Address each point that is brought up that is relevant to the subject of the conference. Stick to the issues.
- Be open, but be specific and firm about your educational philosophy and your reasons for your actions.
- Give positive suggestions. Compliment the parent(s) for caring.
- Provide closure and a plan of action.

20 Ways Parents Can Help at School

1. Help build resources and equipment (bird houses, collecting nets, shelves, learning centers).
2. Act as monitor for cafeteria, hall, or playground.
3. Prepare and bring food items.
4. Assist with special tutoring.
5. Make a presentation or performance.
6. Read to students.
7. Job sharing.
8. Help make classroom decorations and design learning walls, etc.
9. File, sort, hole punch, copy etc. Help with secretarial chores.
10. Make learning games.
11. Contact and/or organize other parents.
12. Chaperone a field trip (even if it is just to the grove of trees at the end of the campus).
13. Help prepare materials for labs and projects.
14. Donate materials.
15. Help with special classroom or *school events and projects.
16. Assist with pet or plant care.
17. Contact businesses about possible donations or sponsorships.
18. Help with class newsletter.
19. Help with web site.
20. Help students with computers and other technological aids.

Dealing With the Over-Involved Parent

1. Be proactive. Invite them when it is convenient for you.
2. Ask the parent to volunteer in classes or areas other than those her/his child attends.
3. Dilute their power by asking underrepresented groups to serve on committees, chair events, and volunteer with them.
4. Steer them towards working for the benefit of all students and sincerely praise their efforts. (Many times these folks are just starved for attention or the chance to contribute something meaningful.)
5. Clearly identify their limits. You are the professional. Let them know who is in charge and has ultimate veto power.
6. Be cautious about sharing information regarding other students, faculty, or administrators. Non-school personnel should not be privy to any confidential information. Gossip is a huge no-no!
7. Keep your sense of self; do not let yourself be caught up in their agendas. Do not be defensive.
8. Invite them to help you get other parents involved.
9. Remind them that it is natural to want a child to do her/his best, but it is unfair and unrealistic to ask her/him to be the best.
10. Keep your sense of humor. (Sooner or later her/his child will move on and so will s/he.)

Helpful Hints For Parents: Communicating With Your Child

1. Listen with your **FULL** attention. A good way to ensure her/his full attention is put them in the front seat of your car and drive them around as you talk with them. (Unless they want to hurl themselves from a moving vehicle, they've got no place to run.)
2. Be aware of body language, both yours and theirs.
3. Use silence to understand your child's meanings and feelings.
4. Use open responses to keep the child talking. "I see." "Tell me more about that part."
5. Accept and respect your child's feelings. Feelings don't have to be justified, they just ARE.
6. Don't interrupt
7. Check out your child's feelings by reflecting what s/he says. "I think I heard you say that you were really angry with Susan." "So you were feeling helpless? Like you wanted to hide?"
8. Be calm. Speak in a quiet voice. Use economy of words (don't talk too much).
9. Stick to the subject.
10. Don't assume that you are making yourself clear. Check for understanding periodically. "Can you tell me in your own words what you think I'm telling you?"
11. Problem solve by discussing a variety of solutions. Emphasize your child's choice in selecting a plan of action.
11. Give your point of view as just that. It's not the law or the only good solution.
12. Don't be a dictator. Remember that children also learn by failing. Allow the child to learn successful problem solving from failing once in a while
13. Avoid nagging, threatening, criticizing, lecturing, or probing.
14. NO Name Calling!!! Attack the problem, not the person.
15. Whenever possible, use humor.

MONTE SELBY'S CHALLENGE ACTIVITY FOR PARENTS:

*You don't need song writing skill to try this – just **courage!***

I like writing songs, so it's no surprise family members have become the topic of my compositions. Writing about those we love carries extra responsibility, because people **remember** songs! I strongly recommend avoiding sarcasm and statements of disapproval. Think of this child on his/her BEST day!

If you were to write a song about your child – one that presents the BEST of that child – what would the title be?

The **CHORUS** could describe his/her attributes (physical, mental, social, spiritual, athletic, musical, emotional, etc.):

Writing **VERSE ONE** might be a great opportunity to describe the obvious (name, friends, foods, heroes, habits, fears, hobbies, etc):

Writing **VERSE TWO** is a chance to predict the future (his/her work, children, hobbies, positive influences on others, impact on the world):
