Parent Involvement

“Making the Connection”

By

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Motivating Factors for Research:

♦ Mixed success with traditional means of parent involvement
♦ New strategies to implement to increase parent participation in the classroom
♦ Diverse population of students
♦ Research states that parent involvement results in a variety of positive outcomes

Who’s Involved?

♦ Parents/Guardians
♦ Educators
♦ Students
♦ Administrators
♦ Family
♦ Community Agencies

What is Parent Involvement?
The term parent involvement refers to a wide variety of supports and activities, which demonstrates participation within the school setting. Typically, parents become involved in their child’s education through traditional means although, other means of direct participation may be taking a more active role both at home and within the school setting.

Traditional Means of Parent Involvement:
- Telephone Calls
- Parent-Teacher Conferences
- Letters/NewsLetters
- Attending school functions such as, athletic competitions, art exhibits, open house, music/drama performances etc.

Benefits of Parent Involvement:
- Increased academic achievement
- Improved student behavior
- Increased student motivation
- Regular attendance
- Decreased drop-out rates
- Positive student attitudes toward homework
- Increased parent and community support
- Increased Test Scores
- Children spend more time at home and at school

Barriers to Parent Involvement:
- Conflicting perceptions of roles
- Logistical Problems-child care, transportation, etc.
School resistance
- Characteristics of Parents- education level, income level, marital status (family structure), ethnicity

Guidelines to Follow when Building a Partnership with Parents:

1. Send a Clear and Consistent Message Regarding the Value of the Child
   - Convey excitement and optimism about the child
   - Focus on the child’s progress; avoid comparison to other students
   - Listen to the child
   - Avoid any interactions, which can be demeaning to the child
   - Talk respectfully to the child

2. Put Yourself in the Shoes of the Parents
   - Understand what it is like to have a child with a disability
   - Understand the stresses/pressures involved with being a parent of a child with a disability

3. Demonstrate an Authentic Interest in Parents’ Goals for their Children
   - Establish a rapport with individual parents
   - Make the child and the parent the first priority
   - Create a comfortable atmosphere
   - Talk with parents and not at them
   - Define roles of the educator and the parent
4. Use Everyday Language
   ◆ Avoid jargon, be clear and concise

5. Talk with Parents about how they want to Share Information
   ◆ Maintain effective ongoing communication between school and home
   ◆ Establish several primary contacts, avoid continual contact with just special educators
   ◆ Make specific arrangements such as, how parents will communicate with the educators, with whom parents will communicate with, and how frequent parents will communicate

6. Expand your Awareness of Cultural Diversity
   ◆ Work towards Multiculturalism; provide diverse learning experiences
   ◆ Participation is staff development programs; understand different cultures and the values that are important

7. See Individuals-Challenge Stereotypes
   ◆ Avoid making assumptions about the child, in regards to family structure, socio-economic status, etc.
   ◆ Explore inaccurate generalizations

8. Create Effective Forums for Planning and Problem Solving
   ◆ Hold meetings year round; avoid only meeting for annual reviews
9. Support Full Membership for All Children
   - Develop expertise in the area of team planning
   - Develop long-term, school wide plans to offer full membership to all students, not just upon the request of individual parents
   - Restructure - increase the number of inclusive settings

10. Persevere in Building Partnerships with Parents
    - Educators need to extend themselves and do what needs to be done to build educator-parent partnerships

5 “New” strategies for Educators to implement within his/her classroom/school building:
   - Curriculum Wheel
     - Students and parents use a reciprocal journal to communicate what content is being taught by the educator on a weekly basis. The curriculum wheel is a circle divided into equal parts, and each part represents a particular discipline. At the beginning of each week, the educator creates a curriculum wheel, which is placed in each student’s reciprocal journal. When the specific content has been taught, the students then respond either in written or pictorial form based on something he/she found interesting. On Fridays, students take the reciprocal journal home and share with parents their learning experiences that occurred throughout the week. This strategy provokes discussion between parents and their children, and it also allows parents to
become aware of classroom objectives.

♦ Parent Resource Center
  ♦ The resource center for parents is an opportunity for parents to become informed about certain issues and materials that are related to child development, discipline, health and safety, drug education, special education, parenting skills, and social service agencies. Also within the center, parents may find textbooks, videotapes, and cassette tapes, which can be borrowed for reasonable time limits, to assist in the learning process at home. Within the center, computers and televisions are available for parents to access further information regarding their child’s education. This strategy empowers parents to take the initiative to improve their knowledge about school related topics.

♦ Classroom Website
  ♦ Each educator designs his/her own classroom website, which includes a parent page. Available on the parent page are: daily lesson plans, weekly bulletins, homework assignments, upcoming field trips, projects, events, and assessment/grading policies. Also on the page there is a link that allows parents to access the educator’s email. Parents are able to ask questions or respond to information provided by the educator. This strategy allows parents to access both classroom and school information on a 24 hour basis, and it also allows for teachers to communicate more effectively.
**Homework Hotline**

At the start of the school year, the educator will send a letter home informing parents about the homework hotline and what it consists of. If parents are willing to be participants on the hotline, a full name, along with a telephone number is requested by the educator in order for that particular student to be contacted at home. The educator makes a final draft of the hotline participants and sends it home to parents. The homework hotline is similar to a phone tree, in which parents or students may call other classmates to obtain forgotten or missed assignments. This strategy not only promotes communication between classmates and parents, but it also allows students to be absent with the knowledge that he/she may contact another student in his/her class for missed assignments. This reduces the amount of late or incomplete assignments.

**Expertise Day**

Each month an educator will invite one parent, guardian, grandparent, or family member of a student to present a talk or demonstration about his/her specialized knowledge or skills about a particular topic/issue. Topics may range from occupations to a presentation on one’s family history. Educators may allow this member to stay for the remaining activities of the school day. This strategy reveals the importance of skills and
knowledge for one to possess, in order to be successful in the real world. This strategy also allows the member to become an active participant in the classroom.

Other Strategies that may involve Parents:

♦ Parents may act as tutors
♦ Parents may serve as tour guides in the school
♦ Parents may participate in bake sales and/or car washes to raise money for school supplies
♦ Parents may serve as volunteer in the classroom; completing tasks such as, laminating materials, sorting papers, putting up bulletin boards etc.

Parent Survival Kit “Tool Box”

In order to make the school year as successful as possible, educators may distribute a survival kit to each parent at the onset of the school year. Each object in the kit, along with the tip, will assist parents in making their child’s learning experience, a success. Parents may add to the kit throughout the school year.

♦ Cotton ball-The cotton ball is to remind you that your child’s classroom is full of kind words and warm feelings.
♦ Hugs & Kisses-The hugs and kisses are to make everything worthwhile.
♦ Tissue-The tissue is to remind you to help dry your child’s tears.
♦ Sticker-The sticker is to remind you that we all stick together and help each other.
♦ Star-The star is to remind you to encourage your child to shine and always try his/her best.
♦ Rubberband-The rubberband is remind you to be flexible. Things might not always go the way you want, but they can be worked out.
♦ Penny-The penny is to remind you that you are valuable and special.
♦ Toothpick-The toothpick is to remind you to “pick out” the good qualities in your child.
♦ Bandage-The bandage is to heal hurt feelings between you and your child.
♦ Eraser-The eraser is to remind you that we all make mistakes, and that is okay.
♦ Lifesavers-The lifesavers are to remind you that you can come to me if you need someone to talk to.
♦ Pipecleaner-Flexibility is important for a successful school year.
♦ Wiggly eye-Keep an eye on your child to discover how best to help him/her.
♦ Jingle bell-Ring for help if you need it. We are here to help one another.
♦ Clothespin-Hang in there!
♦ Bubble gum-To remind you to stick with it and your child can accomplish anything.

Example Checklist for Improving Parental Involvement
(answer yes or no)
___1. There is a place in the building for parents to gather informally.
___2. The office has a friendly, informal atmosphere.
___3. Parents are not viewed by school staff as being deficient.
___4. Efforts are made to involve culturally diverse parents.
5. Communication between teachers and parents is effective.
6. The atmosphere in the school is not bureaucratic.
7. There are clearly defined policies regarding parental involvement in school.
8. There is a school-wide homework policy in place.
9. There is an inservice program for staff that addresses parental involvement.
10. There is an inservice program for the Board of Education that addresses parental involvement.
11. Training programs for parents are available.
12. Parents are truly empowered to make decisions in this school.
13. Families are a priority in this school.
14. The businesses in the community are involved in the school.
15. Community involvement is evident in this school.
16. Parents are asked about their children’s thinking and behavior.
17. Parents routinely work in classrooms with children on learning activities.
18. Parents in this community advocate for children’s rights.
19. Parents are promptly notified about problems with their students.
20. School staff are aware of cultural and language barriers.

Example Letter to Families

Dear Parent or Guardian,

This year I will be getting to know your son or daughter as a learner and as an individual with special interests and learning needs. I’ll be asking you to help me by returning a checklist with your perspectives on your child’s interests and learning preferences. My purpose is to increase my students’ interests in and excitement about learning and, most importantly, to help them be successful in school.

This school year you will see or hear about the teaching ideas I am using to better meet the needs of all my students. Students will be learning in a variety of ways. Sometimes we will all be working together; at other times, students will be working in small groups, with a partner, or on his/her own. For group work, they will sometimes choose to
who to work with and what project they want to tackle. Other times, I will form groups and assign projects based on what students know, what they need to learn, or how they prefer to learn. All Students will be offered challenging learning experiences and all will be actively involved in their learning.

My goal is to provide opportunities for all students to be successful and to enjoy learning. Students love both variety in learning and taking on new challenges. They learn at different paces. Students also have preferences about how they like to learn and how they like show what they have learned. I will be doing my professional best this year to attend to differences among students, trying to ensure that each student is a successful, confident learner.

Please feel free to call or email me with questions or comments. I would enjoy hearing from you.

Sincerely,

References:

♦ (The reference provides educators with tips on how to connect with parents and their children on a positive note.)

♦ (The reference focuses on differentiating instruction by interest, profile, and readiness levels. This also provides educators with great ideas on how to involve parents in a differentiated classroom.)
