

# Special Report

## Building Positive Relationships: Parents as Partners in Teaching and Learning

Educators today work with students experiencing a variety of parenting and guardianship scenarios: involved parents, disinterested parents, single parents, working parents, adoptive parents and relatives serving as the primary guardians. To achieve and improve the academic and social outcomes parents and schools strive for, an effective partnership is necessary. Seeing parents as a valuable resource can help initiate positive relationships that lead to success for all involved.

Here are some ideas for how you can get started inviting parents into your classroom and educational community:

- **Reach Out First.** Many parents today are confused about their role in their children's educational experiences. They want to be involved, but don't want to be seen as a "helicopter parent." They feel an ownership in their child's success, but respect the role of the teacher in constructing the learning process. Communicate to parents that you encourage their role as a supporter of their child's education and consistently affirm their contributions and involvement.
- **Involve Tech Tools.** Set up a website or online newsletter where you can provide parents with updated, accessible information. This strategy is mutually beneficial as it serves as a communication vehicle for parents and advocates parental support of your endeavors with their child at school.
- **Encourage Questions and Sharing.** Be sure parents are aware of your goals and expectations for their child's educational experience during their time with you. Welcome

their questions and offer ideas on how they can support your efforts from home.

- **Make the Time.** Identify and share blocks of time during your workday or week when you are available for individual conversations and meetings to address parents' questions, comments and concerns. Politely inform parents that these windows are the best times to discuss student progress, and that you're happy to accommodate them during the outlined timeframes.
- **Keep Your Door Open.** Some parents may be hesitant to get involved for fear of intruding in your classroom. Assure them that your door is open: invite parents to observe their child's school life. They will see their child in action and subsequently, you may land some volunteers that will support your work.
- **Create a Connection.** Reach out and intentionally connect with parents. Consider a weekly newsletter, home visits, email or even a phone call to introduce yourself, ask for assistance or share good



news about a student's performance. In addition, providing resources to facilitate continued learning outside of school helps parents reinforce expectations and measure progress at home.

- **Accept All Forms of Participation.** Not all parents' schedules afford them the flexibility to volunteer their time, yet they may want to contribute something to their child's educational experience. Consider sharing a list of items that could be easily donated, like first aid supplies, paper, scrap material, art project supplies, etc. If you are looking for guest speakers or field trip ideas, consider parents as untapped resources.

### Communication Considerations

As you work to implement these strategies, be sure to keep in mind...

- Not all families have a home computer or easy access to the Internet.
- You will not know all the answers to parents' questions, but you can commit to finding them out.
- Not all parents work first shift.
- Children do not tell their parents everything that is going on.
- Not all parents use English as their first language.
- If you ask for help, most parents will be happy to oblige.

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