

How to Improve the Quality and Quantity of Your Caregiver Involvement - 50 Simple Ideas

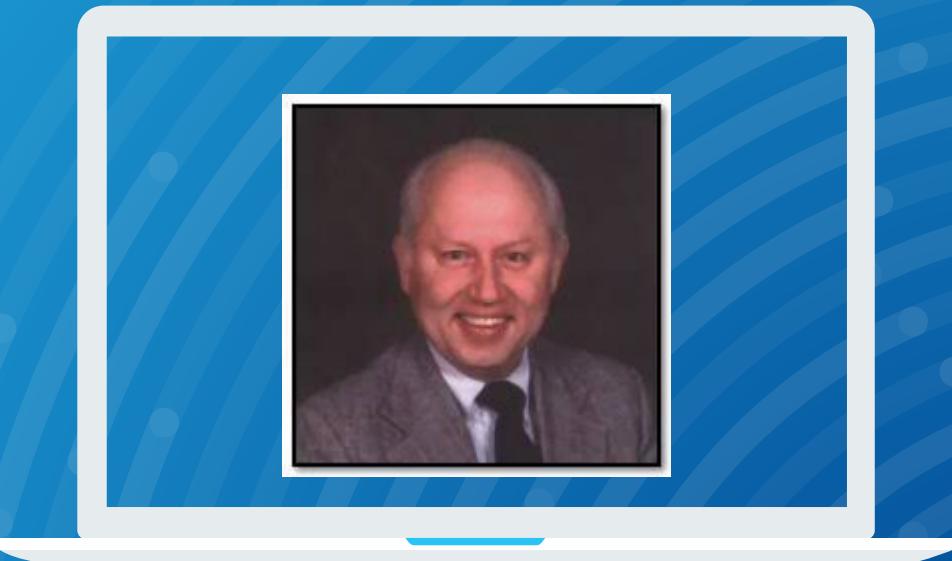
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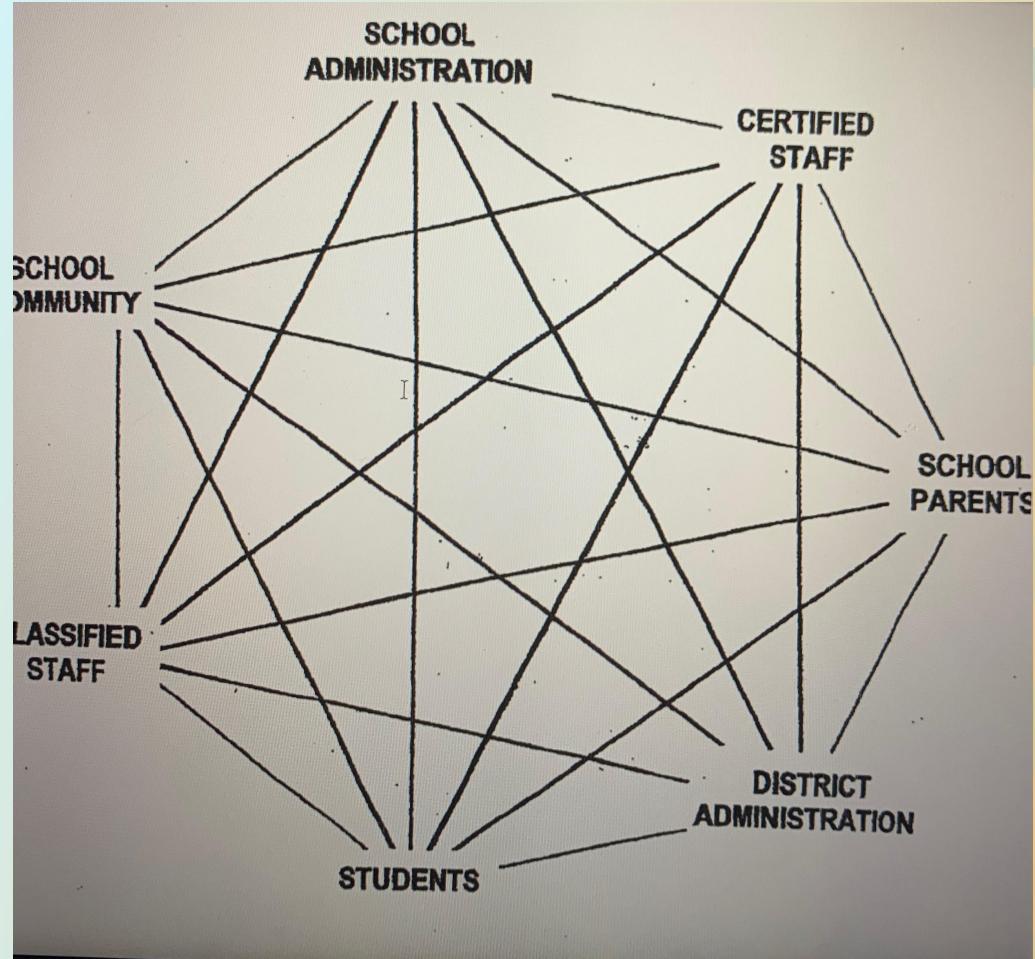
Dave Shepard - The Middle Matters

Dave Shepard

The Middle Matters & More
PO Box 22794
Lexington, Kentucky 40522

middlematters@aol.com
859-494-3270





A school's desire to improve its relationships with parents does not need explanation. What schools want are suggestions. Many schools express concerns and lament over the lack of parent involvement, yet have no concrete plan to improve the situation.

Answer “yes” or “no” to the following questions to see how prepared your school is to involve parents.

After honestly answering the items, educators can easily see how much emphasis has genuinely been given to this issue at their school. If a school really wants to make significant changes in any aspect of its culture or climate, it must have a plan which is consistently talked about, acted upon, and monitored.

Planning for Parent Involvement

1. Our school has a written, prioritized school improvement plan.
2. Our school plan specifically lists improved parental support as one of its top three priorities.
3. The need for improved parental support in our school was identified by analysis of some type of data over a two- or three-year period.
4. The school plan has a quantifiable goal written as part of the parental support item. For example, “Contact 100 parents” or “Increase the number of parent conferences by 5 percent.”

Planning for Parent Involvement

5. Parent involvement has a specific action plan that states what will be done and how this activity will impact the current situation.
6. The action plan identifies several educators by name, not anonymous committee, who are responsible for implementing and monitoring the action plan.
7. The action plan includes a concrete budget to be used solely for the purpose of enhancing parent involvement. The budget specifically states how much money will be allocated, where the money will come from, and who will have the authority to spend it.
8. The action plan has an evaluation component that requires regular reports and summaries to be shared with all stakeholders.

Fifty Tried & True Tips to Connect With Parents

1. Be sure that every child in the school has an adult advocate who has regular contact with the child AND the parents/guardians.
2. Arrange flexible hours for all conference days. Schedule after school, before school, evenings, or on Saturdays, They work like we do.
3. Hold well publicized open houses, family nights, or parent nights to introduce families to teachers, programs, facilities, and the curriculum at least once a year.
4. Supply all visitors to the school agency with a courtesy comment card to get feedback/comments on their visit.(how were they treated, did they get answers to their questions, how was the environment/atmosphere)
5. Set aside an area in the school's media center for parenting materials. Have pamphlets, books, DVDs, etc. available on adolescent behavior, college readiness, how to manage twitter, drug awareness, or any topic THEY want information on. Include information about their age group.

Fifty Tried & True Tips to Connect With Parents

6. Use a student assignment book, agenda, or weekly newsletter to be sure that parents/guardians are informed of what is and will be happening at your school. In lower grades have parents/guardians sign off when they have seen it. Telling them what has happened does not allow them to participate.
7. For middle level parents/guardians (grade 5-9)provide a free copy of the pamphlets H.E.L.P. and M.O.R.E. H.E.L.P. Give these out when they come to meetings or conferences. The pamphlets are available through the AMLE website.
8. Send out an e-copy of the daily school announcements to any stakeholder you can secure an address from. Include community partners and businesses...they need the information also.
9. Do a faculty bus tour of different areas of the school district to provide staff with knowledge about where their students come from. The opportunity to make home visits in small groups before the school year starts could send a welcoming sign to parents. Give each group several homes/apartments to visit. Advertise this event to parents in advance.

Fifty Tried & True Tips to Connect With Parents

10. Hold ice cream socials, potluck dinners, chili suppers, or team/academy picnics to create a sense of community in a non-academic setting. IF YOU FEED THEM - THEY WILL COME
11. Adopt a three rings maximum on all phone lines in the building. Have all calls answered by a real person. Develop and practice professional, friendly greetings for all staff and student helpers to use. Parents dislike computer directed/push button calls as much as you do.
12. Provide parent education workshops on specific topics and subjects that they are interested in. Ask stakeholders what THEY want addressed. Evenings and Saturdays work best. ‘Understanding my middle school child.’, and ‘How can I help my child after High School?’ always seem to be popular topics.

Fifty Tried & True Tips to Connect With Parents

13. Set up, advertise, and staff “Homework Help” locations at central neighborhood locations or business sites in the district for both drop-in and scheduled appointments. Be willing to meet away from the building so that parents might feel more comfortable.
14. Design a tri-fold handout, school agenda, refrigerator magnet, laminated index card, or flyer that lists phone numbers of which people to contact at school and how to get help or information.
15. Establish a phone system which provides voice mail, homework help, upcoming activities, and a parent message hotline (have PTA/PTO/PTSA parents monitor this line directly establishing a parent-to-parent contact).
16. Call parents/guardians with good news about their kids on a regular basis (once a month minimum). Set a tone of positive communication early in the year.

Fifty Tried & True Tips to Connect With Parents

17. Use school or agency postcards to send notes to families (for example, “I just wanted to thank you for allowing me the opportunity to teach Fred. He is a joy to have in class”). Supply all staff with 20-25 cards.
18. Plan for family lock-ins. Open the gym, ask everyone to bring a sleeping bag and pillow, and have family games, watch movies, and provide late-night snacks and an opportunity to spend time with staff.
19. Use student-led conferences to ensure that everyone is accurately informed of student/child progress. Provide the parent/guardian with a written record of the conferences, and keep a copy yourself. Be sure to include in this record an action plan for assistance by parents and staff.
20. Set up conferences that focus on strengths and are devoid of physical barriers or “power” setups. Always avoid educational jargon.

Fifty Tried & True Tips to Connect With Parents

21. Establish a support group for single parents/guardians of students and/or for ELL parents/guardians. The school need only provide a space and the initial information/advertisement.
22. Ask educators to practice C.P.R. (courtesy, professionalism, respect) at all times with parents/guardians and have students practice with each other. Have staff practice with each other also.
23. Provide opportunities for children to work on community service projects both inside and outside the school/agency. Encourage families to work together on such projects (similar to “Adopt a Highway”).
24. Hold a Parent University on a Saturday or at night.. Have parents/guardians go through three or four sample classes with authentic tasks, lessons, and exams (for example, cooking, portfolio writing, dancing, open response questions, test taking).

Fifty Tried & True Tips to Connect With Parents

25. Facilitate the development of a parent network for help in knowing what is really happening on the social scene of children/adolescents. Encourage parents to call the parents of other children to find out more about party plans or other social activities when in doubt. Help Parents learn how to monitor email, twitter, and social media.
26. Get wired and online. Do announcements and reminders via email, since almost everyone has access to computers and online services (at homes, libraries, coffee shops, and so on). Provide email addresses for all staff members.
27. Place one whole set of textbooks and/or required reading books in the public library for display and use as resource books. Too many students “forget” to take books home. This allows students access to books after school hours, but the library is open. Inform all parents !!
28. Use “Feel, Felt, Found” as a common strategy during communications with parents to show support and empathy.

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29. Have parents/guardians do demonstrations or teach lessons during open-house sessions. Involve as many students as possible to encourage parents to attend.
30. If they won't come, go to them. Schedule parent meetings, parenting sessions, conference opportunities, and special programs in neighborhood churches or office buildings. Does the chorus have to do the winter concert at the school?
31. Invite parents/guardians to offer mini-courses to students on specific topics of their areas of expertise. This could be a one-shot event or a regular monthly or bimonthly endeavor.
32. Schedule a heritage/genealogy day with an emphasis on "Where do we come from?". Involve parents or grandparents in storytelling. This is a great way to promote cultural awareness and appreciation of diversity.

Fifty Tried & True Tips to Connect With Parents

33. Offer current and accurate health education information to both students and parents/guardians. Have an annual health/wellness fair with area professionals.
34. Regularly invite small groups of parents/guardians to join their children for breakfast or lunch with the teachers and administrators. Donuts with the staff, coffee klatches with the boss, and so on will work. Involve five to seven students, five to seven parents, and 2 to 3 school leaders. This is an informal gathering by invitation only. Don't just invite the "good" caretakers.
35. Clip any newspaper or magazine articles with students' names or pictures and send them home with a "Good job!" note to the parents/guardians.
36. Invite parent/guardians to come to your school for picture day to have their picture taken with their child. For some it may be their only opportunity for a family print.

Fifty Tried & True Tips to Connect With Parents

37. Communicate the curriculum/subject requirements in an easy-to-read pamphlet for each age or grade level. List topics to be covered, approximate months of coverage, and specific projects that might require extra time.
38. When talking with parents/guardians, always ask for help, assistance, or for their thoughts first when addressing school concerns. The quickest way to make an enemy of a parent/guardian is to say “You need to do _____ about_____.”
39. Establish a parent advisory board to work with each team/academy or grade level. The board’s job is to publicize what the particular group is doing and make sure all parents are informed. Board members may also help with field trips, fundraising and social activities.
40. Adopt school/agency policies that outline methods to increase parental involvement. Schools cannot assume parental involvement just happens. Plan, prepare, and facilitate involvement through committees, team parents, site-based councils, parent surveys, and so on.

Fifty Tried & True Tips to Connect With Parents

41. If possible, provide an open gym or family night activity for parents and kids. Let the parents and/or children do the planning by grade or team level (for example, basketball, line dancing, kids versus parents Olympics, and so on).
42. Set up a parent-staffed welcome station at the main entrance of your school to direct visitors, answer questions, and so on.
43. Establish a Family Resource Center/Youth Service Center staffed by a full-time parent contact person. Staff can help coordinate government agency information so parents know where to turn for help. Provide health care, legal, child care, and food stamp information to parents.
44. Develop a parent/guardian handbook of guidelines and tips such as how to set up a teacher conference, how to help facilitate effective study habits, and how to interpret/measure student success

Fifty Tried & True Tips to Connect With Parents

45. Continually monitor and record the types and quantity of parental involvement. Survey parents/guardians regularly on why they come to school and what else they may need.
46. Recognize parent/guardian efforts to be involved. Send thank-you notes to volunteers and chaperones, congratulation notes on new births, follow-up calls after conferences, and notes of praise for positive changes in behaviors or academics.
47. When assigning take-home tests or activities, include a question for the parents/guardians that is experience-based from a parent/guardian's perspective.
48. Establish a variety of advisory or advocacy options for parents of special-needs children. Inclusion, collaboration, or consultation models expand experiences for students, which in turn allows for more positive parent reactions. Make sure parents have this information.

Fifty Tried & True Tips to Connect With Parents

49. Work hard to make the physical facility clean, neat, orderly, inviting, and welcoming to families.

50. Display lots of student work on the walls throughout your facility and in buildings throughout the community.

Draw up an action plan and don't ever, ever, ever quit trying to reach the unreachable.

Parent/Student Conference Form

Student's Name: _____ Date: _____

Language Arts:

Strengths

Math:

Strengths

Science:

Strengths

Social Studies:

Strengths

Major Area of Concern:

Student:

Parent:

Teacher:

Parent/Student Conference Form

Student's Name: _____ Date: _____

Action Plan

1.

2.

3.

Signatures: _____

Standards for Parents as Partners in Learning

Parents are critical to their children's well being and success. Reflecting upon their own experiences, more than 1500 parents generated the following standards and practices for parents in helping their children learn. While the standards guide parents in supporting their children's learning, they also guide the school and community in providing the information, support, and involvement opportunities that parents desire.

A Parent Partner in Learning...

- Attends to the child's physical, emotional, social, and behavioral development.
- Develops the family as the child's first teacher.
- Prepares the child to achieve the standards at school.
- Provides home support for the child's meeting the standards.
- Supports the child's school and teachers
- Is a lifelong learner and teacher

As a student caregiver for a student attending _____, I will do _____

_____ this year to support these standards.