

Encouraging Family Involvement

Children are motivated to become readers when their teachers and families work together. Here are some ways that teachers can reach out to families and forge partnerships with parents.

1. Recognize and address the obstacles to family involvement

- Schedule meetings at times that are convenient to working parents
- Avoid using educational jargon

2. Value each family's unique goals for their children

- Survey families to ask about their hopes and dreams for their children
- Listen and show that you value their opinion
- Consider sending home an interest survey or interview each family to understand their culture, tradition, special holidays observed, etc. As an extension try to stock your classroom library with books that mirror the diverse families in your classroom. Invite students and/or their families to present on what makes them special.
- Find out what you can do to support family reading times.

3. Address language barriers and show respect for every family's culture and home language

- Translate parent education materials and school communications into families' first languages
- Learn to speak, read, and write a few words in the language(s) children speak at home. Invite families to share the rhymes, songs, poems, and stories that are part of the cultural traditions.
- Have a resource person available who can translate spoken information to families
- To request a translator from the U.S. Department of Education visit https://www.lep.gov/interp_translation/trans_interpret.html

4. Establish Trust

- Make it a habit to communicate with families regularly
- Avoid calling in parents only for problems, try to give positive feedback as often as possible
- Hold meetings in neutral settings, such as resource centers

5. Use familiar words rather than educational jargon.

- Talk about *reading and writing* instead of *literacy*, *books* instead of *literature*, *pictures* instead of *illustrations*, and the *classroom* instead of *the learning environment*.

- Many words have changed in education since family members attended school when they were young. Use language that family members will be familiar with and if you must use a new term be sure to explain what it means. For example, say “word decoding or his ability to sound-out words.”

6. Use technology to connect schools to homes

- Use voicemail to provide taped messages for students and their families
- Make use of email to communicate with students and family members

7. Set achievable goals

- Set literacy goals for children with their input and input from their families and school administrators
- Inform and involve parents in helping children achieve their set goals
- Review goals periodically with students and their families to make sure they are realistic and attainable

8. Coordinate with librarians and other community support systems

- Inform families of literacy efforts and events sponsored by the community
- Encourage families to take their children to the library and/or bookstores
- Coordinate with local RIF programs to get books in the hands of your children for their home libraries

9. Reach out to family members that display leadership to recruit other families

- Work with family leaders to involve hard-to-reach family members
- Plan family education meetings and workshops
- Sponsor literacy-related events at school
- Leverage the free literacy resources at RIF.org/literacy-central to provide digital resources for all families

10. Take advantage of training

- Contact the NEA (National Education Association) and/or the AFT (American Federation of Teachers) for information on training programs
- Enroll in adult education programs that feature such training
- Encourage administration to provide on-site training on family involvement

11. Proactively identify ways families can be involved in their child’s reading engagement and progress.to keep track of their children's reading and writing progress.

- Families can share samples of the drawings and writing their children do at home. Ask them to tell you about words their child has learned and favorite books they read at home.
- Encourage families to use their unique skills to make learning exciting. For example, a creative parent who likes to sing could make up a silly song filled with rhyming nonsense words. teach the class a song.
- Establish a classroom lending library. Make it easy for families to borrow books to read aloud to their children. Enlist families to help set up the library and keep track of the books.
- Make a progress marker to keep track of books read at home. Use colored construction paper and have families write the title and author of each book on each a cutout to be added to the display. For example, for each book read families can add a leaf on a reading tree, a wiggly worm to the fishing bucket, a gumball to a giant gumball machine, etc.
- Issue a family reading challenge. Challenge parents to match at home -- book for book - - the amount of reading aloud that you do at school. Designate a two-week challenge period. Read at least one book every day in your classroom. Send home a note with the title of the book you read and a question or two that parents family members can ask their children about it. Also send home a progress marker (see above) so families can fill in the title of the book they read to meet your challenge.

Source: Reading Is Fundamental

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