

POSITIVE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN YOUR SCHOOL

Why is positive family engagement important?

Research tells us that when families are involved in their children's education, children earn higher grades and receive higher scores on tests, attend school more regularly, complete more homework, demonstrate positive attitudes and behaviors, graduate from high school at higher rates, and are more likely to enroll in higher education than students with less-involved families. For these reasons, increasing family involvement in the education of their children is an important goal for schools, particularly those serving low-income and other students at risk of failure.

Whole School Family Engagement Strategies. Examples: Family Literacy Nights (i.e. Book Blast), Family Math Nights, Family Game Night

Purpose:

- Build a sense of “community” between students, teachers, administrators, parents/caregivers and community members.
- Provide parents/caregivers skills (literacy tips, importance of daily school attendance, etc.) and resources (books, board games, math games) to be better teachers at home.

Process:

- Make sure the event is aligned with school goals (math, reading, science, positive child-parent relationships, kindergarten readiness, summer learning, etc.)
- Make sure the event is FUN for both kids and parents – and offers FOOD.
- Send out multiple communications to parents and caregivers (flyers with RSVPs, school messenger texts, reminder stickers on students the day of).
- The morning of the event, invite parents/caregivers to join Community School staff and principals for coffee and donuts, keep things conversational and focused on relationship-building, while promoting the night's family engagement event.
- Conduct a parent/caregiver survey to find out time availability and topics of interest, schedule the events with this in mind.
- Make sure parent/caregivers sign in, so Title 1 parent engagement dollars can be used to pay for food, supplies.

- Offer a raffle for families to incentivize attendance; collect donations from community partners to support the raffle.
- Provide a giveaway so parents can continue the learning at home (dice for math games, flash cards, board games, books, book marks, science kits).
- Ensure there is a good student/parent to volunteer ratio so there is adequate support for parents as they practice new skills or strengthen existing ones.
- Encourage school staff to participate; offer staff incentives like Principal's parking spot for a day, extra 15 minutes of prep time, leaving 15 minutes early, pizza party for their classroom, etc.)
- Ask for parent feedback with all events; survey should be no longer than 5–6 questions, and always with a “what can we do better” question.
- Best practice sites for whole school engagement events: Roosevelt, Central

Targeted Parent Workshops. Examples: financial literacy, parenting skills, what to expect with transitions (kindergarten, 6th grade, 9th grade), housing rights, bullying, special education rights, etc.

Purpose:

- Provide parents/caregivers with specific skills or information, based upon their needs.
- Create a smaller venue for more intimate conversations and relationship-building.
- Build trust with families and uncover possible social service or basic needs.
- Expect a smaller audience (20-30 people is success!)

Process:

- Conduct a parent/caregiver survey to identify topics most relevant to them (provide a thorough list of topics which the school would be able to provide).
- Ask parents/caregivers for best times to provide workshops (morning, right after drop-off, after school, evening or Saturdays).
- Provide free child care for younger siblings; make use of interns, community volunteers.
- Offer coffee, water and light refreshments for families (much of this can be donated by area businesses or paid through by Title 1 family engagement dollars).

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- Schedule the top five–six topics which parents have requested, and at the time most parents identified as being available.
- Across most United Way Community Schools, morning right after drop off has been a very successful time to run parent workshops.
- Reach out to community partners to identify training topics and cost, though many providers will offer trainings at no cost: Community Action Council of the Lehigh Valley (financial literacy, housing rights, first time home buyer programs); Center for Humanistic Change (bullying, cyber-bullying, drugs and alcohol, stress management, positive discipline, parenting and more); North Penn Legal Services (housing and tenant rights); Kids Peace/Lehigh County Office of Integrated Behavioral Health/ Pinebrook Family Answers (behavioral health needs and resources for kids and families).
- Conduct a pre- and post-survey to assess impact; always ask the “what can we do better” question.
- Ensure all communication is in English and Spanish (many providers, like Center for Humanistic Change, offer Spanish-speaking trainers)
- Topics should include, but not be limited to: bullying, safe social media, special education rights and process, concerns with child’s behavior.
- Best practice sites for targeted parent workshops: Donegan, Central

Targeted Academic Workshops: workshops for parents by academic concern or grade level*Purpose:*

- Provide parents opportunity to learn more specifics about child’s academic learning for the year, empower parents to be better teachers at home.

Process:

- Early in the school year, invite parents into child’s classroom for observation.
- Explain the core content and curriculum, and basic literacy practices that the parent could reinforce at home.
- Allow parents onto computers to practice on-line academic interventions (ie. Study Island, etc.), teach parents how to navigate school district website to track student’s attendance and academic performance.
- This can be done as a during school day event or as a before or after event – depending on parent and school staff availability.
- Some schools have run a one-day event with all grades; others have scheduled different grades on different days.
- Most success has been with younger grades (kindergarten–1st grade) and transitioning grades (5th grade).
- Run workshops on specific academic skill sets: read aloud strategies for kindergartners, new math concepts for 3rd–5th graders, homework strategies for students with ADD/ADHD, etc.
- Best practice site for academic workshops: Donegan

Parent Education Classes: GED, English-language classes, computer skills, specific job training*Purpose:*

- Empower parents with the skills they need to be successful in life.

Process:

- Survey parents to assess their own educational needs and interests.
- Network with area providers to connect parents with requested education services as needed (either provided on-site at school, or refer parents to off-site services).
- Network with higher education institutions to utilize college and graduate students, and college faculty to run English-language classes or computer classes on-site at the school.
- Ask parents if they want a more conversational English class or a business English class beforehand, and tailor the class to meet these specific needs.
- Good resources are the Literacy Center, local libraries, Career Works, and local faith-based partners.
- Best practice sites in parent education classes: South Mountain Middle School, Roosevelt

A Parent Resource Center*Purpose:*

- Connect parents with the resources they need (food, clothing, housing, job training, child care, education classes, etc.)

Process:

- Find a space that can be designated as a “parent resource center,” even a space as small as a closet can work.
- Fill this space with bulletin boards, walled shelving units and decorate with fliers, brochures on any and all relevant services and supports.
- Make sure to provide all materials in English and Spanish.
- If possible, provide at least one computer and printer in this space so parents can practice their computer skills, look up job searches, apply for jobs, create resumes, etc.

Targeting the Most At-Risk Families*Purpose:*

- Identify the most vulnerable families so all students can be successful.
- Connect families with needed supports.
- Build relationship of partnership between school and parent.

Process:

- Ask parents to self-identify strengths and concerns for their child (academic, behavioral, attendance, peer relations); use this information to build a support plan with parent for their child (example: Positive Family Check-Up Model).
- Use student data on chronic absenteeism and student behavior to identify most vulnerable families.
- Conduct one-on-one parent outreach (through phone

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calls, home visits, scheduled parent meetings) with identified parents to assess concerns, share supports, build plan for success.

- Develop partnerships with social service providers to connect families with case management services; utilize partnerships with area masters in social work or psychology programs to provide social work and behavioral health care on-site at the school or in the home.
- Have regular team-based meetings with key school staff (nurse, administrator, Community School Coordinator, guidance counselor, intervention specialist) to identify families in need of greater support, discuss all critical information on identified families, connect with all of the needed interventions and supports, monitor progress and continue to discuss concerns.

Building Parent Relationship and Connection to School

Purpose:

- Empower parents to develop leadership, advocacy and self-determination skills.
- Build positive relationship and trust between school staff, leaders and parents.

Process:

- Encourage parents to volunteer in the school.
- Encourage parent representation and voice in Leadership Team meetings.
- Encourage parent leadership of specific projects.
- Conduct a parent survey of parent volunteer interests and ideas for the school.
- Develop systems of regular communication with parent (newsletter, texts, fliers).
- Provide structured opportunities for parents to interact with school and Community School staff (Fountain Hill’s Parent’s Café, McKinley’s Mustang Mom’s Club, etc.)
- Operate PTA, PTO, PTG and align this work with Community School activities and school goals.
- Best practice sites in parent empowerment: Donegan, McKinley

Family Engagement Capacity Building Framework

