



IDEAS THAT WORK (INCLUDES MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL IDEAS)

Please note that we are using the words parent and family interchangeably. Anywhere you read parent(s), include family(ies), and vice versa.

Communicate, Communicate, Communicate



Contact parents early in the school year to welcome them to your school and establish lines of communication before any problems arise.

Conduct a parent survey early in the school year to find out how parents want to be contacted and what their goals are for their students. There is a sample survey in your tool kit.

Don't keep the good news to yourself. Plan to send a postcard, e-mail or call parents on a regular basis telling them something good about their child's progress and letting them know about upcoming meetings, curricular objectives, testing or homework projects.

Friday Folders. Establish one day a week when parents can expect to find information from school in student backpacks. Include notes from teachers, school newsletters, meeting announcements and so on.

Introduce the Million Word Essay by Deborah Bova

https://www.educationworld.com/a_curr/profdev/profdev080.shtml

At the beginning of the school year she prepares a simple handout asking parents to 'in a million words or fewer, tell me about your child.' Parents do the rest. It's a wonderful way to learn about students and begin to develop a partnership with parents. For parents who may be uncomfortable writing, use this question as the starter for a phone conversation, parent teacher conference or home visit.

Parents and Teachers Talking Together. Plan a Parents and Teachers Talking Together session to initiate a conversation about goals for your students.

Recognize parents. Parents need to know you appreciate their support. Give parents certificates for working in your classroom and other volunteer activities at school. For parents who cannot come to school and struggle just to get their children to school – give them a certificate if they get their children to school every day for a month.

Schedule a “vision meeting” for the PTA, school council and family resource or youth services center council once or twice a year. Use this opportunity for joint planning and scheduling.

Share the class syllabus with parents and let them know what they can do to help students learn.

Telephone Tree. Ask parent volunteers to develop a telephone tree to remind parents of important meetings and events.

Two-way communication helps build partnerships. When you send homework assignments, meeting notices, comments about your students, leave a place where the parent or family member can check that they have read it and make additional comments.

Create a Parent and Family Friendly Atmosphere

Be friendly, Smile and call students and families by their names when possible.

Families like to know someone knows their child and they like to be recognized and called by name. Using name tags can make this process easier for staff and families. In a recent survey, Title I parents said the most important thing teachers and principals can do to make them feel welcome in the school is smile, be friendly and respect them and their children.

Organize volunteer greeters at the front door to welcome students and parents at the beginning of the day.

Welcome visitors to your school with a friendly sign that says something like, “Welcome! For the Safety of our Students and Staff we ask All Visitors to Register at the Front Desk.” Remember to also include a friendly hope you return sign upon exiting that says something like, “Thanks for coming! Looking forward to seeing you again soon.”

Create a Parent Room or Parent Corner:

Create a book swap for families. Put a box or basket in the office or parent center labeled “Parent and Teacher Book Swap.” Encourage parents to share books they’ve read with others. Start by leaving several good books and magazines with good information for caregivers.

Create a lending library including booklets and information for parents. Include a copy of your schoolwide plan or school improvement plan, school council minutes and policies, school report cards, and other good information for parents.

Make a computer available to parents who don’t have access at home. Use one that’s been donated or no longer used in the classroom.

Set aside a place for parents with comfortable chairs, a coffee pot, reading material and a bulletin board for announcements.

Hold Special Events and Activities:

Back-to-school Ice Cream Social: Hold an ice cream social for families at the beginning of the school year to meet teachers, classmates and other families. Share a list of volunteer opportunities at school and at home.

Bagels and Boobos: Invite parents and family members to a breakfast of bagels and conversation about raising children.

Breakfast with your Best Man or Donuts with Dad: Invite fathers to breakfast with their children. Share information about the important role they play in their children's education with a list of suggested learning activities.

Coffee with the Principal: Invite parents and family members to have coffee and donuts with the principal on a regular basis. Offer information about school goals and the focus and progress on schoolwide plans or improvement plans, and answer questions.

March Madness: Hold a special event in March when everyone is ready for winter to be over. Provide dinner and workshops for parents on stress, exercise, healthy snacks, helping your child succeed or other topics. Ask parents what they would like to know more about.

Mother's Day Tea: Invite mothers/grandmothers to have tea with their child in early May. Display student work and discuss student progress toward learning goals. Have students make a gift of a written letter or artwork for their mother.

Parent Workshops during Activities: While students are enjoying a school skating party, hold an information session for parents.

Parent University: Invite parents/families to an evening or Saturday morning of workshops on parenting, homework, portfolios, moving to middle or high school and so on. Ask parents what they would like to know more about. (Workshops/classes could also be offered virtually after ensuring everyone has equipment and internet access.)

Hold a **Parent's First Workshop** in early December, prior to a school orchestra, band or choral program. Students participate in arts and crafts activities to make holiday gifts for family members. A buffet of appetizers is available for parents and staff and students are served pizza and juice. Solicit help from the student council, PTSA (Parent Teacher Student Association), faculty and local businesses. Give parents a copy of the book *The 10 Greatest Gifts I Give My Children: Parenting from the Heart* by Steven W. Vannoy. Following the workshop parents were invited to the concert. For more information

contact: TC Johnson, Director, Winburn Middle School Youth Services Center, Winburn Middle School, Lexington, KY 859-381-3970.

Portfolio Pizza Night: Hold a pizza supper with a focus on writing portfolios early in the school year. Share information about writing portfolios with a list of things parents can do to help. Celebrate student work by displaying it and having them share with their parents. This is a good activity for elementary, middle and high school.

School lunch day: Designate one day a month as a special time to invite parents or family members to join their students for lunch.

Transition from preschool to elementary to middle school to high school creates stress for students and families. Hold special orientation sessions for parents as well as students. Invite faculty and students from the receiving schools to answer questions. See No Recess in Junior High School below.

Make School Events Fun with Incentives

Create a volunteer coupon book that is checked every time the parent visits school for a parent/teacher conference or to volunteer. When the booklet is full, the parent gets a prize (t-shirt, mug, hat, etc.).

Door prizes and raffles draw interest. Seek donations from local businesses for items such as fast food and other restaurant certificates, hats, T-shirts, children's books and coffee mugs. One school raffled a limousine ride and movie tickets and drew the largest crowd ever.

Provide resources and learning opportunities for parents:

Arrange for adult education, literacy, GED and English as a second language classes at your school. Advertise them to your families. Work with your family/resource or youth services center to inform families and offer childcare.

Create a **Giving or Angel Tree at Christmas** for families in need. Ask families to attend a parent/teacher meeting or volunteer at school in order to participate.

Make the computer lab available after school to parents and students who do not have computers at home.

Offer a regular **"Mommy and Me"** workshop for parents who speak another language. Use it as an opportunity to help parents feel welcome in the school, develop language skills for parents and children, and help these parents understand and help with your school's goals.

Organize special interest groups for parents of special needs students, gifted students, and others. Bring in speakers who can offer information and help with their unique needs. Offer childcare during these sessions.

If the school has a **washer and dryer**, offer use of it in exchange for volunteer time at the school.

Serve Food

Offer refreshments as often as possible for events when families are invited. Food lends a more friendly atmosphere to every event.

Select dates for events with the needs of families in mind. In schools with a high percent of students on free lunch, hold pizza or chili supper nights toward the end of the month when paychecks run out and food instability might occur.

Ideas that Work for Middle and High Schools

Organize parents to serve as **hall monitors** in your school during especially busy times. This gives students other adults to interact with and creates a safer, friendlier atmosphere in the school. This is a good volunteer job for second or third shift workers.

Hold a Parent, Teacher, Students Talking Together

Hold Freshman, Sophomore, Junior and Senior Days for Parents Set aside a day for each high school class and invite parents to spend all or part of the day. Begin with breakfast with the principal, counselors and students. Invite parents to attend classes, have lunch and attend information sessions targeted to that class's needs.

Involve Parents in Individual Graduation Plans

Create an advisor/advisee program assigning 15-20 students to each faculty member and appropriate staff to work with each student throughout their high school career to develop and maintain the Individual Graduation Plan. Involve parents in meetings with the students as they select their classes each year.

Develop an information booklet for parents and students about preparation for college. Model your book after **“Keys to Success: A Guide for College-Bound Students”**.

No Recess in Junior High. Create a booklet and a Saturday workshop to prepare parents and students to make the transition from elementary to middle school.

Postsecondary Education Resource Room. Create a special room, place in the school

library or counselors' area for students and parents that contains materials on postsecondary education. Make sure parents are aware of this resource by advertising in the school paper, making announcements at PTA meetings and at open houses.

Ready for Work: Essential Skills for Jobs. Hold a conversation in your school with students, educators, parents and local business leaders about student preparation for college and the workforce, skills considered essential for new employees, and what makes an individual an attractive candidate for employment.

Parent and Family Engagement Tool Kit for School Leaders originally created 10/03