

IDEAS THAT WORK and Ideas that Work for Middle and High Schools

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 as suggested by Deborah Bova on the MiddleWeb listserv . At the beginning of the school year she prepares a simple handout asking asks 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. See Planning for Parent Involvement in your tool kit for more information.

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 Friendly Atmosphere

Be friendly. Smile and call students and parents by name when possible. Parents like to know someone knows their child and they like to be recognized and called by name. 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.”

Create a Parent Room or Parent Corner:

Create a book swap for parents. 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 parents.

Create a lending library including booklets and information for parents. Include a copy of your 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 school 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 written letter or artwork for their mother.

Parent Workshops at Champs: 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.

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, 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. Follow 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.

Invite a speaker from **The Student Loan People** to talk with parents and students about financial planning for college. Elementary school is not too early to begin planning for postsecondary education. Contact: The Student Loan People, Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority, Kentucky Higher Education Student Loan Corporation, 10180 Linn Station Road, P.O. Box 24266, Louisville, Kentucky 40224-0266, toll free: 888-678-4625 or www.studentloanpeople.com.

Take the Test Day or Assessment Fair for Parents

Hold a meeting just prior to testing time for parents and family members to take sample Kentucky Core Content Test, STAR Reading or SRI Math tests. Share information about standards and performance based assessments.

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.). Contact T.C. Johnson at Winburn Middle School's Family Resource Center for more information 859-381-3970.

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 food stamps and paychecks run out.

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. Check with Lafayette High School if you have questions 859-381-3474.

Hold a Parent, Teacher, Students and Business Leaders Talking Together based on the Prichard Committee's Parents and Teachers Talking Together to discuss mutual goals for students and what needs to be done to reach those goals. Contact the Prichard Committee for assistance. 859-233-9849

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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 classes 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. For more information about a good example contact the principal at Eminence High School, 254 W. Broadway, Eminence, Kentucky 40019, 502-845-5427.

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**" prepared by graduates of the Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership in Paducah, Kentucky. Most of the information in this booklet pertains to any high school student in Kentucky, making it fairly easy to adapt to your school. Contact: Donna A.Chu, 105 Jalusian Trail, Paducah, Kentucky 42001-8805, 270-554-1608, dachu2@comcast.net.

No Recess in Junior High. Create a booklet and a Saturday workshop to prepare parents and students make the transition from elementary to middle school. For an example of a booklet and program contact: Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, P.O. Box 1658, Lexington, KY 40588-1658, 859-233-9849, e-mail: admin@prichardcommittee.org

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 Kentucky 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. For more information contact the Partners for Kentucky Schools, 859-455-9595 or www.pfks.org.

Invite a speaker from **The Student Loan People** to talk with parents and students about financial planning for college. Contact: The Student Loan People, Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority, Kentucky Higher Education Student Loan Corporation, 10180 Linn Station Road, P.O. Box 24266, Louisville, Kentucky 40224-0266, toll free: 888-678-4625 or www.studentloanpeople.com.

More Good Resources for Planning Parent Involvement

Building Relationships for Student Success, by Diane Dorfman and Amy Fisher
November 2002. This book draws from current research and school experiences to give teachers, parents, and administrators examples of successful partnership strategies. Teachers, parents, and staff at six high-poverty, high-minority schools were interviewed to provide their perspective on what research-based methods look like in practice. Cost: \$7.45 plus shipping and handling or download and copy at <http://www.nwrel.org/partnerships/pubs/building.html>
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 101 S.W. Main Street, Suite 500, Portland, OR 97204, Telephone (503) 275-9500

Parent Involvement: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratories: Web site <http://www.nwrel.org/comm/topics/parent.html> offers numerous publications on involving parents, including Parent Partners: Using Parents to Enhance Education <http://www.nwrel.org/request/march99/index.html> and many others.
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 101 S.W. Main Street, Suite 500, Portland, OR 97204, Telephone (503) 275-9500

Partnerships by Design: Cultivating Effective and Meaningful School-Family-Community Partnerships by Debbie Ellis and Kendra Hughes, October 2002 is a practical, realistic tool, focused on working with families and the community that provides easy-to-read information and an efficient planning process. It contains simple forms, worksheets, and activities that help schools and organizations write their own school-family-community partnership plan. \$8.50 plus shipping and handling. Contact: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratories, <http://www.nwrel.org/partnerships/pubs/bydesign.html> Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 101 S.W. Main Street, Suite 500, Portland, OR 97204, Telephone (503) 275-9500

Parent Involvement Tool Kit for School Leaders 10/03