



Effective Parent Engagement Strategies for Parent Involvement Coordinators

- 1. Meet and welcome all parents** - It is important to meet and welcome all parents early in the school year. This can be done through neighborhood and community gatherings, during open-house, parent-teacher conferences, or while attending other school-related functions. Also try sending personalized letters and emails or making phone calls. Create a welcoming environment by making parents and families a priority. Assign each faculty and staff member a certain number of parents to contact regardless of their job description. Contacting all parents can be quite a challenge, but by making an effort, parents realize that you've taken a personal interest in them and their child which leads to better partnerships throughout the year.
- 2. Provide specific ways parents can contribute** - Parents may want to volunteer at the school, but often are unaware of what they can do or how they can help. Survey your parents at the beginning of the year to learn their skill sets and availability to assist with various projects. Be direct and creative. Then reach out to parents directly with certain projects or tasks that can be completed either at school or at home. When parents are asked to get involved and feel a sense of worth, you are likely to find more parents willing to volunteer.
- 3. Offer a variety of incentives** - Sometimes it takes incentives to get parents in the door. Even during this budget crunched economy, there are still innovative ways to provide incentives for parents. Check with your local supermarkets, restaurants, recreational facilities and/or school partners to see what they can do to help provide incentives free of charge. These companies are often looking for ways to become involved in education and make charitable contributions.
- 4. Recognize positive efforts** - Parents feel a sense of pride when they are recognized for their contributions, big or small. Take time to say thank you, spotlight various parents' efforts throughout the year, or share a token of appreciation. Many parents are unable to be physically present at the school as often as they would like due to work schedules or health problems. Other issues that could be beyond their control are a lack of transportation or childcare. So when you praise their efforts, it compels them want to do more.

5. **Listen to parent suggestions** - Make it a point to solicit parent comments or suggestions on a regular basis through surveys, meetings, or a suggestion box. Create a school culture where both positive comments and ways in which the school can improve are shared. Listen and document all forms of comments or suggestions, be sure to address as many of these suggestions as possible. Parents will appreciate the school's effort especially when they see positive changes being made.
6. **Avoid making pre-judgments** – All parents come to school with various life experiences and perspectives. Therefore, be wary about making pre-judgments about your school's parents, because chances are you will make the wrong assumption. Some parents may appear to be uninterested or apathetic about school events, but when you look below the surface, you may find that they are very engaged and active with their child at home. Since this is often the case, seek to provide *all* parents with additional at-home tools that will help their child be successful.
7. **Promote parents as leaders** - The best way to connect with all parents at your school is to have other parents serve as catalysts for increasing involvement. When parents see other parents playing an active role in their child's education, they are motivated to do the same. Promote parents as leaders by including parents as members on various types of school planning events, committees, advisory councils and other meetings. Ensure parents are seen in multiple roles throughout the school building. Groom parents to co-host parent workshops and recruit other parents to participate. When parents are seen as partners in school leadership, they feel a sense of ownership and are likely to do more.
8. **Encourage networking** - Parents need a support system, too, and can often find the best support from one another. At parent workshops and events, give parents the opportunity to introduce themselves, talk briefly about their children and discuss ways to address parenting issues. Ask parent leaders to serve as a catalyst for breaking the ice in an effort to grow unity and excitement among various groups.
9. **Establish a parent resource center**- If you want active parent involvement, it is important to have a place where parents can gather to share and learn about educational resources. A parent resource center is a great way to promote the importance of parents in the school. It provides a meeting place for parent volunteers and education workshops as well as educational resources for parents to take home to use with their children. If you are unable to establish a center, create resource bags that include educational videos, games, reading materials and instructions on at-home activities that can be completed with their child. Send notices home with students advertising the materials you have available and encourage parents to utilize them. Be sure to also tie the materials used to student achievement scores and progress!

- 10. Practice cultural competency and sensitivity** – It would be a mistake to take on a one size fits all approach with the parents in your school. Parents come from various lifestyles, ethnicities, and cultural backgrounds. They may be grandparents, foster parents, aunts, uncles, legal guardians or another adult who serves as the primary caregiver of a student. It is important to take time to educate the school community on the diverse cultural makeup of your particular student and family population. By doing this, you will ensure that all parents and students feel included and respected.
- 11. Focus on the strengths of your families** - All families have something they take pride in and do well. Some families place a high value on trivia nights, eating dinner together, or supporting one another at sporting events. Find out what’s important to the families in your school and share that information with the teachers and other school staff. Then, look for ways to re-create that home-family environment at school functions and events.
- 12. Build relationships** – Simply put, parent and community engagement is about building relationships. Nothing else matters if you are ineffective at connecting with parents at your school. The goal in building relationships is to establish a strong foundation for learning and student achievement. Parents are much more likely to collaborate with individuals they believe are genuinely interested in the well-being of their children. At times there will be obstacles to overcome, but it can be done with perseverance and vigilance. Do not be surprised if adjustments need to be made in the strategies, approaches and methods you use but know that this does not equate to failure. Believe in what you do, be passionate about the cause, and know that you are impacting families and making a difference every day by building these relationships.
- 13. Change verbiage from “parent training”** – Understand where your parents are coming from. For many, there is a stigma attached to the term “parent training”. Most parents feel like they are good parents and do not need training from the school. As a result, while the content may be necessary, meaningful, and important, parents are not supportive of the hosted trainings. Switching to the use of terms such as parent enrichment, parent seminar, parent university, or parent meeting will likely spark interest and increase the chances of parents participating.
- 14. Provide advance notice** - Proper scheduling and advertising is important and necessary to encourage attendance at workshops or other school events. Family life is busy, but by providing parents with adequate notice and information about school functions, you’ll increase the odds of better attendance. This is especially true if time off work is needed, job schedule adjustments need to be made, or if childcare is required. Try issuing a monthly calendar of events highlighting special opportunities for parents.

- 15. Expand communication methods** - Parents are busy people and may need to be contacted through several methods of communication. It is necessary to go beyond the traditional route of sending an event flyer home with students. You must make an extra effort to inform and communicate with parents in a variety of ways. Some of these methods can include but are not limited to: notes on the school marquee, public service announcements, e-mails, text messages, a message on an automated call-system, posters, personalized notes, invitations, or phone calls. It is also imperative that communications sent home are in all languages represented by your parent population so everyone can be informed.
- 16. Host a variety of events** - Have parents participate in academic as well as non-academic events. Curriculum Night and Math Night are exceptional ways for keeping families informed of standards and new teaching strategies, but you can also have a night where parents come to view their child's art work, science experiments, or other unique projects they may not have an opportunity to see on a regular basis otherwise. Plan events for students and parents at the same time. Hosting events for both students and parents is usually successful especially if student performances or presentations are involved.
- 17. Help solve non-academic issues** – Academics are important, but students cannot excel academically when emotional and social issues are at the forefront. Many parents need help with resolving issues that are non-academic such as bullying, substance abuse, and peer pressure. Providing help with confronting these topics and others that affect your school community can build parent support and ultimately lead to better student performance.
- 18. Involve the community** - Everyone in a community benefits when students achieve. Make sure all community members are welcomed and invited into the school on a regular basis. Ask local businesses, faith-based and community-based organizations to sit on various school councils and teams. Recruit community members to speak to students and parents on various topics. When businesses and community organizations are seen as true partners with the school throughout the year, they are also more likely to be active and offer additional support and services without being asked.
- 19. Use simple evaluations** - It is important to use simple, anonymous evaluations when trying to solicit parent feedback. The surveys should not be lengthy or complex. Get to know your parent population and tailor the surveys accordingly. Be sure to distribute evaluations after workshops or meetings so you can assess what was learned, enjoyed, or resulted from the event.

- 20. Provide child care and transportation** - For some parents, lack of childcare or transportation may be a hindrance to attending school events. If you have an event for parents only, ask school faculty and staff to volunteer their time to monitor the children or reach out to local community and faith based organizations to see if they will provide volunteers under school staff supervision. Get creative with providing transportation by using community and faith-based organizations, school buses, or setting up a carpooling system. Even better, try holding events in neighborhood community centers so groups of parents can walk to the event.
- 21. Acquire teacher and administrator buy-in** - Without the support of teachers and administrators, getting parents engaged will be very difficult. Parents notice when the school culture is one of respect and acceptance. Be sure to communicate your parent engagement efforts to both teachers and administrators, let them know how they can be of assistance to you, and explain how parents as partners can truly have a positive impact on the entire school community.
- 22. Collaborate with others** - Parent and community engagement is not a job that can be done alone. You are the organizer, but sometimes you need the help of others to achieve desirable outcomes throughout the school year. At a minimum, make sure you are collaborating with other family engagement professionals in the school and community such as the special education parent mentor, pre- K school transition coach, school social worker, school counselor, resource officer, and/or nurse. Collaboration takes time, so do not get frustrated if it does not happen immediately. Keep trying and eventually you will see change begin to happen for the benefit of your students and families.
- 23. Gain the support of other PICs** - The job of a Parent Involvement Coordinator (PIC) is tough. So, it is always helpful to have others in the same field with whom you can share experiences, tackle hard problems, and lend support. By attending the Georgia PIC Network meetings each fall and spring, you will have an opportunity to meet and network with other PICs in your area. Still wanting more? Sign up for the Georgia PIC Network Google Group. This network provides a central place for Parent Involvement Coordinators throughout the state to communicate and help one another out all year long. To sign up, please visit <http://groups.google.com/group/georgia-pic-network?hl=en>.

24. Share updates and knowledge with school staff - Ask your principal to be added to the agenda at the next staff meeting. During this time, provide an update on the work you have accomplished and the various opportunities the school has offered to its families. Provide tips or mini workshop sessions on parent involvement research and ways teachers and administrators can continue supporting parent engagement efforts throughout the year. Commend everyone for their hard work and discuss ways in which you all can continue to help each other.

25. Link parent engagement efforts to student achievement - Research shows that when schools and families support each other, students of all backgrounds and abilities achieve at higher levels. However, research is not enough. It is important to continually track meaningful and measurable outcomes to ensure that your parent engagement efforts have a direct link to student achievement. Targeting measurable outcomes is not an easy task but it must be done to show the benefits of parent engagement in education. Learn more about how to successfully wrap school, home, and community engagement around student achievement outcomes by listening to the 360-Degrees of Family Engagement Series conducted by the Georgia Department of Education and Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning.