

# Seven Tips to Effectively Engage Parents

A paradigm shift of how school leaders think about parent involvement is necessary. The role of the “traditional parent volunteer” must be expanded to include a new category of fully engaged parents who influence both student success and the effectiveness of their entire school community, according to Marilyn Price-Mitchell and Susan Grijalva, cofounders of National ParentNet Association and ParentInvolvementMatters.org. School leaders need to focus attention on how to engage the 21st century parent. Educators must become more deliberate and creative with strategies to encourage and motivate parents to become more involved.



Based on our experience as practicing educators and an involved parent, these seven tips are designed to help school leaders develop winning plans that encourage the 21st century parent to become more engaged.

## ■ Buy-in vs. Due-in

Some school personnel think of parent involvement as helping with fundraisers, chaperoning a field trip, or delivering something to the school by a due date, which represents a *due-in* atmosphere. Schools with strong parent involvement typically have critical input from parents at the decision-making table that generates a vested interest. This causes the *buy-in* of

parents. Shared ownership causes parents to be engaged and to encourage other parents to participate.

## ■ Say It vs. Think It

Twenty-first century parents may be consumed with personal demands, assuming that they will be notified if something is needed. Discerning whether the school needs anything from them is not at the forefront. Therefore, schools must communicate what is needed versus thinking parents know. Make it easy; just tell parents!

## ■ Technology vs. Manuscriptology

Long gone is the parent who communicates through an occasional

note via the child. The 21st century parent communicates using cellular phones and social media. Ask parents if they use text messaging, Twitter, Facebook, or any other social media outlets. Ask teachers to create a class Twitter account and/or a Facebook page and invite parents to follow class and school activities. This can dramatically increase parent engagement within the individual classrooms and the school because parents will receive alerts and messages instantly to their phones or home computers.

## ■ Innovate vs. Superannuate

So much for bringing in cupcakes or being the faithful classroom parent volunteer. The 21st century parent may simply think they do not have the time and some genuinely may not have the interest. So try a new idea to get a parent into classrooms. Be creative and innovative, so that parents can't say no. For example, ask parents to share holiday traditions or explain their career. If you can get parents in for just five minutes, they will probably stay at least 15 minutes when they are having fun!

## ■ Guidance vs. Avoidance

Some parents may not understand the importance of their role in their child's education. They may need assistance with providing homework help, navigating through technological advances, and knowing when to seek help. Schools should employ a guidance philosophy instead of avoiding parenting problems. Developing and hosting parent workshops or support groups for second time around parents (grandparents who are raising their grandchildren or great grandchildren) or teen moms can provide avenues for parents to increase their parenting skills and parent involvement tenfold.

## ■ Demo and Tell vs. Show and Tell

Schools have very talented and skilled parents. They can become

leaders for various clubs, special activities, or special programs, which allows them to demonstrate their talents, skills, and abilities. Invite parents to a *demo and tell* segment centered on various themes in the school, as opposed to your traditional *show and tell*. This could lead to parents establishing gardening, knitting, cooking, scrapbooking, or other clubs. Parents will feel valued for their knowledge and skills that they bring to the school and view themselves as part of the school community.

#### ■ Award vs. Record

When trying to engage the 21st century parent, schools should consider an award or reward strategy for parental involvement. Recognize the parent and his or her child for the efforts that have been displayed and the impact on the school. Sometimes making special events or other activities competitive can increase parent involvement because parents and children want to win school-level competitions. Reward the class with the most parent volunteers for the month, for example. Recognizing parents and children does not always have a cost. Free reward alternatives include extra recess time or a PTA-sponsored field trip.

Parent involvement is critical to any successful school, and educators must be creative in their approach to engaging parents. Schools may need to encourage, praise, and help meet the needs of parents in order to secure their commitment. The minimal uses of resources to implement these seven tips will yield an impressive return on investment. ■

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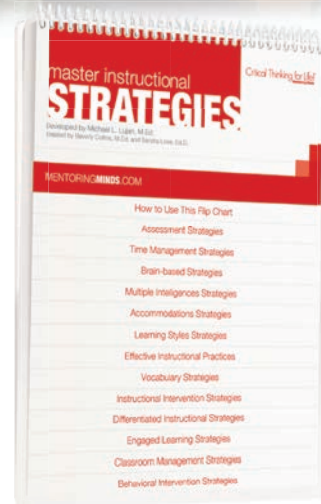
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