

Engaging Family and Community

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How can schools engage families and the community to ensure student success? Linda invited principals and teachers to share strategies they use to involve parents as partners and how they meet challenges in their communities. Statements below reflect participants' convictions and ideas about family and community engagement.

Consensus was strong that clear, authentic communication between school and home is vital for student success. Advice included:

- Schools and teachers stay in touch with parents through positive and frequent information and messages.
- Every teacher is encouraged to reach out to parents through personal contacts and whole-class messages.
- Schools use a variety of ways to communicate with parents and families: phone, email, newsletters, Web pages, automated calls, backpack notes.
- Schools can help parents learn to use online communication, such as student grade portals, so they can stay on top of their children's school work.
- Schools can embrace text messages and social networking media as strategies to engage and inform families and the community.

Participants agreed that schools bear responsibility for initiating and maintaining effective communication with families and communities. Advice:

- Schools are responsible for building a welcoming culture and environment.
- Relationship-building is the key to effective communication and community-building.
- Take time to know your parents in the same way you take time to know your students.
- Keep striving to get parents and community members engaged in school activities; the connection is not automatic or immediate.
- Don't expect parents to come to you. Meet them in community centers, churches, and neighborhoods.
- Partner new families with veteran families so they learn about the school.
- Create fun, informative family reading, math, and science nights.
- Offer babysitters for younger children so that parents can focus on school programs.
- Hold parent-teacher conferences when parents are available—primarily, at night.
- Encourage teachers and staff to make friendly home visits to families whose children are beginning kindergarten, middle school, or high school.
- Stimulate family participation in school events by offering bonus points for students or coupons redeemable for homework passes.
- Issue VIP badges (Very Important Parent) to parents when they visit your school.
- Invite parents to enrich school programs by sharing their culture, occupations, and talents.