Opening the Doors of Communication and Guiding Parents into Classrooms and Schools

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Opening the Doors of Communication and Guiding Parents into Classrooms and Schools

Katy Forsyth
Opening the Doors of Communication and Guiding Parents into Classrooms and Schools

Katy Forsyth
Honors Thesis
Table of Contents

The Heart Behind this Project ........................................ 1
Why do our Children need Parent Involvement? ........ 3
What is Parent Involvement? ................................. 7
Parents, Teachers, and Administrators Perspective
   And Roles ......................................................... 9
   Parent Perspective ........................................ 9
   Teacher Perspective ..................................... 11
   Administrator Perspective .......................... 14
Resources for Teachers ............................................. 16
   Books ......................................................... 16
   Internet ..................................................... 17
   Articles/Journals/Periodicals ....................... 18
Ideas, Ideas, and More Ideas .................................... 21
   Parenting ................................................. 21
   Communicating ........................................... 22
   Volunteering ............................................. 23
   Learning at Home ....................................... 24
   Decision Making ......................................... 25
   Collaborating with the Community ............... 26
The Road of Success ................................................. 28
Bibliography ......................................................... 32
The Heart Behind this Project

“A good parent is a national treasure and we need to make parents and families partners with their children’s teacher and principals in the process of education,” (Beyond the Classroom 308). This quote is the heart behind the contents of this book. For the love and concern that we as teachers have for the children in our lives, we owe it to them to help make their educational experience the most well rounded prosperous experience possible. To accomplish this, a partnership needs to be created by opening the doors of communication and guiding parents into classrooms and schools. As teachers, it is our responsibility to encourage the partnerships between home and school.

As time passes things change and the world around us becomes stranger from the world we once knew. While our world is changing, our knowledge and open-mindedness help us to be aware of the different situations our students experience at home. The partnerships formed with the home of each student may or may not include biological parents. With the diversity of family structure, the partnerships may include parents, grandparents, foster parents, stepparents, guardians, or other relatives. For our purposes and to keep the ideas as concise as possible, the term parents will be used to describe the individual(s) who serve as the child’s caregiver at home.
Why Do our Children Need Parent Involvement?

UNITY
I dreamed I stood in a studio
And watched two sculptors there.
The clay they used was a young child’s mind
And they fashioned it with care.
One was a teacher—the tools he used
Were books, music, and art.
The other, a parent, worked with a
Guiding hand,
And a gentle heart.
Day after day, the teacher toiled with touch
That was deft and sure,
While the parent labored by his side
And polished and smoothed it o’er.
And when at last, their task was done
They were proud of what they had wrought,
For the things they had molded into the child
Could neither be sold nor bought.
And each agreed they would have failed
If each had worked alone.
For behind the teacher stood the school
And behind the parent, the home. (Burns 88)

One day at work you are discussing the effects of a new procedure brought down “from the administration” with a co-worker. During your discussion, your co-worker presents a perspective you have not yet considered. Although this view has not changed your personal view, it has altered the reasons behind your view. We, as adults, do not go through our daily life oblivious to everyone and everything around us. People we work with, have discussions with, and live with effect us in one way or another. We do not live our lives in plastic bubbles. Why do we forget that our children do not either?

As children grow they are influenced, in one way or another, by all that they experience in their environment and the people in their environment, such as family,
peers, school personnel, and community members (Kaplan 56). Parents and teachers have a large responsibility to children and their future due to the fact they are the two categories of adults that spend the most time with children (Kaplan 56). With all these influences in and out of school affecting a child, whatever happens in one situation can transfer over to another (A Pocket Guide 2). For example, if a child has a difficult time staying awake in class, it is not likely that it is due to the child being bored. It is caused by another reason, such as he sneakily stayed up too late playing video games in his room. Even factors such as frequent school absences and tardies, emotional problems, poor grades and low achievement tests, grade retention, and discipline problems are not simply characteristics of a student or the student’s behavior. Rather, they are products of countless interactions among a variety of individuals and events in the child’s life (Kaplan 55).

By involving parents in schools, we are helping to create a positive home-school relationship that can be one of the most successful influential factors in a child’s life (Jones 7). As children see positive adult role models participating in their daily life by checking on his/her progress with his/her homework or volunteering to help chaperone a field trip, they see parents as partners. This is just one way that interaction with adults shows support for the child and interest in the child (Burns 9). The reason behind increasing parent involvement in schools is not just related to role modeling or the child’s self-concept. It also influences the learning environment in more positive ways than one. For example, the adult-child ratio is decreased which increases one-on-one time for students; being in the schools gives parents a new or adapted perspective about how a
home to school relationship effects children; and it increases the amount of parents who are knowledgeable about the needs of the children and school (Wolfendale 57).

All the planning and participation involved in creating a parent involvement program works towards helping children achieve excellence. The change in the level of excellence can be seen in the academic, behavioral, and emotional areas of a child’s development. The results that can be observed in school include improved performance, homework habits, and positive attitude toward school. Students motivation increases, develop greater self-confidence, and changes inappropriate behavior are effects that related directly to the child’s self-concept (Burns 9 and Kaplan 9). Fewer placements are made in special education and increased post-secondary enrollments are also other differences seen as a result of parent involvement. The changes over time effect the schools’ atmosphere by improved civic responsibility and citizenship, (A Pocket Guide 13). In other words, “there is less apathy, less violence, less despair, less drug use, fewer pregnancies, and dropouts. It means more learning. It means better education,” (Kaplan 59).

Parent involvement is one of few things thing that can make a well-rounded difference in a child’s life. How well a child does in school is determined by the amount of involvement their parents partake in education (Kaplan 120). For example, the numerous things children learn in pre-school are not as important as parent involvement during that time (Burns 46). Although children from all ages and backgrounds can benefit from parent involvement, low income and minority students have the most to gain (Jones 7). The differences made by parent involvement for students are evident to sustain
across grade levels for low and middle-income students (Kaplan 59). Students are not the only ones who experience personal benefits from parent involvement.

As children experience positive changes, parents and teachers do too. Parents’ self-images improve, increase confidence in ability, and respect for educators increases (Burns 10). A greater respect and understand for parents and increase of confidence in their competency are just a few of the positive effects teachers experience (Jones 18).

The variety of aspects that are effected by parent involvement are positive changes. Changes that are better for all those involved, from one child to the whole class. No only do the positive outcomes of parent involvement effect individual students, but also everyone within the environment are positively influenced.
What is Parent Involvement?

The term parent involvement can mean many different things to many different people. For our purpose, parent involvement means parent participation in their child’s education and school. There are many different levels and areas that a parent can participate to be involved. The four main levels described in the research are spectator, support, engagement, and decision making (Kaplan 121). At each level, the degree of involvement and types of involvement vary. These levels are just the beginning of the components which describe parent involvement (Peressini 321).

The first level of parent involvement is spectator. From the parents’ perspective in the spectator level, their relationship with the school has a negative foundation. It is at this level parents look at teachers and school personal as “the authorities” who do not wish to be bothered by those outside the educational system. At this point, if parents become involved at all, it is outside the school walls (Kaplan 121). Parenting is a functional area found in the spectator level (Peressini 321-325).

Following the spectator level is the support level. It is in the support level that parents take more responsibility in their child’s education. Although parents are participating at this level, their fear of not being of use or unwanted in the school. In the support level, a parent will complete requests when asked at particular times as long as too much time or effort is not required and will attend visits at the school upon request. The acknowledgement of responsibility to their role as a parent increases from the spectator to support level (Kaplan 122). Communicating with open lines between school
and home is the next functional area of parent involvement, which is found in the support level (Peressini 321-325).

In the engagement level, comfort with the school and school personnel takes a large jump in a positive direction when compared to the spectator and support levels. Parents who are within the engagement level see the relationship that they have formed with the school as one made out of respect. By observing the school and becoming a participant in the child’s experience at school, a parent at the engagement level is involved (Kaplan 122-123). Found within the engagement level are volunteering and/or observing in the school and learning at home by monitoring and assisting (Peressini 321-325).

The last level of parent involvement is decision-making. In this level, parents help make changes and express themselves more. This avenue is usually taken through school committees or organizations. These parents require a relationship with the school based on interdependency. Unfortunately, many times parents reach this level of involvement due to unhappiness and/or disagreement with the school’s decisions and/or actions (Kaplan 124). Areas of community collaboration and decision-making are both found in the decision making level (Peressini 321-325).

In the perfect world of education, parent involvement would always reach the levels greater than spectator and support. However, with the numerous uncontrollable influencing factors that world of education is not realistic. Although it may not be a realistic perspective, it is not an excuse to give up on aspects that would help create a part of our perfect world of education. It is our job as educators, to reach out and encourage others to do the same for the children we care for so much.
Parents, Teachers, and Administrators: A Partnership

Increasing parent involvement takes the effort of three different groups of expertise: parents, teachers, and administrators. Each group is an expert of children in a different way. Although each expert’s knowledge is gathered in different situations each is valuable and has its purpose (Wolfendale 3 and 8). To create an environment capable of increasing parent involvement and a positive experience for all those who participate, each group must understand the perspectives and responsibilities of each expert. It can not be successful without each person using their knowledge to accomplish the same goal—to help children become successful.

Parent Perspective

"'One who brings forth or produces” and “a person who has care, custody and control over, and concern for a child’’ are both descriptions that correspond with the title of parent (Wolfendale 20). It is a child’s parents who have seen him grow, learn, and play numerous years before they step through the doors of institutional education. A parent has been alongside the child during his past experiences. The habits and routines of a child’s feelings and behavior are pieces of information a parent has gathered through years of observation and living the experience. With all this knowledge of a child, it is obvious that a parent is an expert of their child outside of the school environment.

Even though parent involvement is a valuable and much needed resource, it is becoming scarce due to changes occurring in family structure and increased responsibilities forced upon parents (Burns 14-15). The number of parents able to attend
school events or volunteer time during school hours has decreased. Due to the rising number of women in the work force and single parent families, time spent supporting learning from school has been limited. The kind and degree of parent involvement possible in schools is directly affected by the numerous socioeconomic changes occurring in our society (Burns 15).

As societal factors are effecting parent involvement, attitudes of parents and developing skills are other types of barriers to overcome. This barrier includes feelings and attitudes such as negative memories from their school experience, receiving only negative feedback from their child’s school, or fear of having their child’s behavior reflect upon their parenting (Burns 12). If parents’ attitudes and feelings do not interfere with their relationship with the school, they may still have to hurdle another barrier, not knowing how to help their child develop academically and/or socially (Burns 13). Knowing how to help a child grow academically and/or socially is not common sense knowledge. It is something that needs to be experienced and/or taught. Negative feelings and attitudes along with skills that are still developing are barriers that are caused by the lack of support from educators and administrators (Jones 40).

Many parents work around or fight against their socioeconomic situations and negative feelings and attitudes, and develop skills to be involved in their child’s education. They do this “to help their own children, to help the school, and to meet some of their own needs,” (Wolfendale 57). For the majority of parents, the want to help is there, but the “how” is not known. Parents usually wait for the “how” through guidance and direction from the teacher (Burns 12). When the supplies and directions are provided, they will help their children learn (Burns, 46). If asked to assist their child with
learning at home by the teacher, eighty-five percent of parents will do so (Jones 40). Parents of all education levels can make a positive influence on their child’s academic development. However, empowering parents through training and support for their efforts needs to be provided for parent involvement to reach its potential (Burns 13). To create self-confidence in parents as partners, the self-esteem and hope of parents needs to be built for the highest effectiveness (Kaplan 129). “We must empower parents to take their rightful place along with teachers and administrators in providing a meaningful education for their children, for without their parents there can be no effective schools and no effective education for the children who need it,” (Burns 75).

When teachers and parents understand, support and educate each other, a partnership develops working for the child. The child’s education “becomes a shared venture” in which each participant is trusted, respected, and valued (Burns 9). In this partnership, each group needs to contribute equally to help achieve the ultimate goal—helping the child succeed.

The child will be successful when the learning that occurs in school and the learning that occurs out of school are complementary to each other (Wolfendale 37). As parents and teachers work in their relationship as partners, their efforts should produce a “connected teaching” which extends the learning from the school to the home and from the home to the school (Kaplan 59). The “connected teaching” form the foundation of the home-school collaboration which is “the key to unlocking the doors to future success for young people in today’s complex world,” (Kaplan 58).

Teacher Perspective

As there are extreme differences in parent views and experiences of involvement, there is a continuum of differences between teachers’ feelings towards this joint
partnership (Wolfendale 10). With the numerous irreplaceable benefits of parent involvement, such as growing students’ success, increased teacher effectiveness, and improved school climate, as a result of parent involvement, it would be assumed that parent involvement programs would be in place everywhere you turned. However, they do not begin on their own. It is most often teachers’ interest and motivation determine if it will occur (Burns 12). Surprisingly enough, there are very few strong and continuous parent involvement programs in place (Burns 10-11).

One of the barriers to instituting parent involvement programs is that teachers are forced to deal with their feelings of fear and negative attitudes. Having parents in the school make some teachers and administrators uneasy (Burns 13). These feelings of fear and negative attitudes are based on the idea that parents will undermine the teacher in the classroom, that parents are uneducated about children and schools, and that the views of the vocal parents are the views of all parents (Wolfendale 10-11). Teachers also believe that many parents do not have the motivation or time to be involved with them or their classroom (Burns 11). From the barriers that teachers face, it seems that they originate from the lack of confidence teachers have in themselves and their teaching ability (Burns 11).

As teachers lack confidence in themselves, many teachers lack the much needed skills to interact with parents (Burns 13). Without the training and support, many teachers encourage the idea of partnerships, but do not initiate programs or work to improve school-wide programs already in place (A Pocket Guide 14). To prevent not knowing how from inhibiting parent involvement, the solution is to educate student teachers on how to work with parents and creating positive feelings regarding
experiences with parents (Wolfendale 11). In the past, the preparation for a career in education has not involved the study of the knowledge, understanding, and ability to work effectively with parents and parent organizations. It is the college of education at higher education institutions across the country who are responsible for preparing our teachers with this information (Kaplan 115). Although it is important to educate our future teachers before they reach the classroom, there must be continuing education on parent involvement for our present teachers to grow in their abilities (Wolfendale 16). Education of parents and parent involvement needs to come from theory and experience (Wolfendale 32). The idea of creating a partnership with parents is considered an extra or something teachers do if they have time needs to be abolished (A Pocket Guide 1). The place to put a stop to this is through early and continuing education.

If parent involvement is to become a reality, it is the teacher’s responsibility to initiate the effort. Not only do they need to initiate the effort, teachers must be conscious of the variety of ways parents can be involved and determine a few choices that are best for their students (Burns 16). Teachers must make the activities parents are involved in comprehensible and fun for all those taking part. Although it should be encouraged for all parents to be involved, if at all possible, teachers should take strong effort to encourage parents of disadvantage students, who would benefit the most (Burns 13).

Educators who do not believe parent involvement is a priority also see their relationship with their students as something that should be protected and distant from the parent-child relationship. Educators who believe parent involvement as a priority try to understand parents, consider themselves a parent at school, and hold themselves as partners to their students’ parents (Rosen 11). The one policy that reaps the most benefits
which teacher should stress is parent involvement (Kaplan 63). As the largest possibility of increasing student's academic, social, and emotional growth comes as a result of parent involvement, it is also the most difficult task to begin and continue throughout a child's education (Jones 7).

**Administrator Perspective**

Parents and teachers are two very important groups in creating a partnership between home and school; however, they can not complete the partnership without the help of the administration within the educational system (Kaplan 120). In the past, the administration was considered to be "at a level" above both teachers and parents and that they knew what was best for our students. However, we now know the best for our students comes from a partnership between parents, teacher, and administration.

Although school administrators are not considered "the best" by themselves, they do hold the responsibility of coordinating, encouraging, and leading the partnership to become a reality (A Pocket Guide 3). The leadership needs to come from the school because: the benefits enhance the purpose and work of the system; the school can provide the necessary information for parents of disadvantaged home situations who would not receive the information otherwise; and they have created numerous barriers to parent involvement. These barriers include assumptions that the school knows what is best because they are the "educators" and distancing parents from what is occurring at school due to the lack of communication efforts and manner the of communication. Due to the fact that the school has prevented parent involvement by through these barriers, it is the school who needs to knock these barriers down (Kaplan 59). Therefore, the school needs to lead the way to a successful partnership through the work of the administration.
In spite of the fact that school should lead the way to a partnership, the responsibility of educating our nation’s children can not be put on only the school’s shoulders (Burns 63). Our schools are placed in and involved in our communities (Wolfendale 66). Our communities can enhance learning through providing educational opportunities and support to help the efforts of schools, parents, and teachers (A Pocket Guide 2). This overlap of efforts will only increase a child’s chances of success. The education of our children is the responsibility of all because each contributes something through the community and schools or as a parent and teacher (Wolfendale 3). They are our future and all our responsibility.

“I participate
You participate
He participates
We participate
You participate. They profit.” (Burns 63)
Resources for Teachers

Books

The authors of this book look at the conditions and applications of parent involvement. Information regarding parents’ perceptions and creating a partnership between parents and teachers is provided.


**Parents and Schools: from Visitors to Partners** is based upon practice of parent involvement programs, not just theory. It looks at parent involvement from parents’ and educators’ perspectives, the good and the bad. Various types of communication are encouraged, improved, and built upon by the authors. This leads us to a closer look at two schools that currently have strong parent involvement programs in place.


Information referring to encouraging parent involvement before children reach school to planning a parent involvement program is provided in this resource. User friendly reference boxes are found throughout this book including tips for parents such as encouraging creativity and helping children with homework. This resource is written mainly to help parents help their children.


**Education and the Family** purpose is to provide educators and future educators with the information to successfully interact with various groups of children and parents. By looking at schools from the inside as well as society’s influence from the outside, a well-rounded perspective is given.


This resource is a quick and easy to use reference focusing on increasing parent involvement. It provides information on how to get started, ways to involve parents, and benefits of successful parent involvement programs.


Within this book are stories in which teachers describe step by step programs that have made wonderful efforts to create positive parent partnerships. There are wonderful examples of information given out to parents or used in the process of increasing parent involvement. A list of books, pamphlets, articles, and video resources are available.
Examples of parent involvement programs from real life experiences are provided. Key information is included in the descriptions along with contact sources for more information if desired.


This book looks at parent involvement from the past, present, and future. It tries to show the influence of parent involvement from as many angles as possible. Children in pre-school to high school are used in examples or illustrations and the unique features of parents involvement for each age group. Two case studies are provided for an inside look into parent involvement programs.

**Internet**

**Michigan Electronic Library-Parent Involvement in Education**

The Michigan Electronic Library-Parent Involvement web site provides a wealth of information to help parents become more involved in their children’s educational lives. Links to a variety of parent involvement information including advocate groups, tips, and educational issues are provided.

**Connect for Kids-Guidance for Grown-ups**

Along with a variety of information regarding children and educational issues, the Connect for Kids web site provides information including increasing parent involvement. Ways of increasing parents involvement, resources, parents tips, online discussions, and other organizations are only a few details focusing on parent involvement available amongst others.

**Project Appleseed: The National Campaign for Public School Improvement**

This web site was created by an advocate group working for public school improvement through parent involvements. News headlines related to schools and children, answers to frequently asked questions, and resource links are included.

**The Parents Institute**

The Parent Institute web site provides a plentiful amount of information in a simple user friendly manner. Information regarding products to help parents help their children and links of parents involvement resources and other sites are given.

**Hand in Hand: Parents, Schools, Community United for Kids**

Hand in Hand: Parents, Schools, Community United for Kids web site focuses on the partnership between home and school. Included in the site are tips for parents, families, and teachers; related web sites; and examples of current programs working to increase the strength of the home-school partnership.
Very few websites focus specifically on living environment or cultural background when discussing parent involvement, but the Urban Minority Families website does just that. A variety of web links to parent involvement publications and internet resources are available.

America Goes Back to School works to build awareness and support for family and community involvement in education. This site focuses on helping the process of parent involvement become a reality. Steps, planning sheets, ideas for long and short term efforts, and publicizing information are given.

Articles/Journals/Periodicals


The authors of this article focus on the need to parent involvement for children in an early childhood program. Information regarding parents needs and roles and how teachers can involve parents is given. This article will help early childhood educators increase parent involvement for the sake of their students.


“Parents as Math Partners: A Successful Urban Story” is a description of the process Linda Carey went through to help the twenty-two students in her classroom reach mastery in specific math objectives. The main influence to the students’ success was the work she did to get parents involved in the math program.


The changes created to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act has made it necessary for the parents and the teachers to collaborate. The benefits of this necessary partnership are discussed in this article.


Although we are working towards encouraging parent involvement in students’ education, we do not want them to complete the work of their child’s education. This article helps teachers to try to decrease the chances of parents doing their child’s homework or projects.


With the great course of change that math education has taken, parents need to be informed why and how math has changed. This should be done through developing a
partnership between parents and teachers. Through this partnership parents, teachers, and children all experience benefits.


Another way to increase participation of parents in education is describe in this article. Diane McCarty worked to create a mathematics lending library that allowed parents and children to enjoy the pleasure and educational experience of reading together while exploring mathematical concepts at the same time. This article is the story of how she did it and some ideas she used.

Pena, Delores C. “Mexican-American Family Involvement.” Kappa Delta Pi Record 35.4 Summer 1999: 166-169.

Teachers’ misunderstandings of families’ cultural backgrounds can inhibit the effectiveness of her effort to increase parental involvement. Delores Pena explores the differences, obstacles families experience, and staff attitudes regarding the partnership between teachers and Mexican-American families.


Trying to create a clearer picture for all involved, the author of this article works to define purpose of involvement parents in mathematics education and what parent involvement looks like. Along with clarifying the general ideas regarding parent involvement, the six major areas of parent involvement are described.


Teachers are responsible for initiating a partnership between the school and the home. However, often times teachers have negative perceptions towards this partnership that gets in the way. Patricia Phelps describes these obstacles, teachers responsibility, and solutions to the barriers to help increase parent involvement.


This article describes how one community had math education become a part of their everyday life. Lower Township in New Jersey wanted to help their children become more successful in math. To accomplish this, the first Parent-Student-Teacher Coalition was formed. This group worked to create a great variety of activities to encourage math exploration and parent involvement.


Eva Thorp, in her article, provides a detailed plan for increasing parent participation and positive partnerships with culturally and linguistically diverse families.

This article describes how one elementary school worked to get all the secrets out in the open and walls broken down so that parents are able to acquire the information they need to fully participate in their child’s education.
Ideas, Ideas, and More Ideas

Who could ever have enough ways of increasing parent involvement? The following pages are filled with a variety of ideas to encourage increasing parent involvement. The numerous ideas are broken down into the six different forms of parent involvement (discussed in the section What is Parent Involvement? pg, 7-8). An idea can be changed, adapted, or extended for the particular need of the program or event. Many of the ideas may overlap into areas besides the particular area it is listed beneath.

Parenting
Parenting- ways to create a home environment which encourages children to develop cognitively.

Parenting Skills Development
- Offer suggestions to establish home conditions that support learning.
- Provide resources on video, computer messages, or workshops with parenting skills and child development information.
- Provide parent education and other courses or training for parents.
- Make home visits.
- Provide an area that parents can go to gather resources or support.
- Present each new mother with a learning packet that holds information on child development, parenting skill, and support networks.
- Perform home workshops (the educational professional went to the child’s home).
- The topics of the workshops should be alternated between those the parents want to learn about and the topics the school thinks parents should know.

Meeting Health and Safety Needs of Children
- Provide families opportunities to meet with community support agencies such as health, nutrition, etc.
- Host a Parent Fair and invite schools, law enforcement officials, mental health workers, arts and cultural groups, colleges, librarians, and medical professionals to set up booths. Have information available on: child safety, drug and alcohol prevention, mental health, after-school enrichment programs, and free or low-cost insurance for children (CHIP 1-877-KIDS-NOW).

Other
- When child repeatedly misbehaves offer the parents the choice of a three-day out-of-school suspension or a one-day visit by both of the parent.
- Offer childcare and transportation to and from events.
Communicating

Communicating—ways that communication is continuously flowing from the home to the school and from the school to the home in regards to the child’s development emotionally, physically, and cognitively.

Ways of Communicating

- Hold conferences with each parent, at least once a year.
- If necessary, provide translators to communicate with parents.
- On a weekly or monthly basis, send home student work for families to go over together.
- Plan to incorporate other means of communication such as personal conversations, notices, memos, phone calls, and newsletters.
- Conduct surveys or inventories asking for parents’ ideas, opinions, and suggestions.
- Video meetings and special activities for the parents who were unable to attend to view.
- Create school-home collaboration folders.
- Change school signs to welcome parents. For example: “All visitors must register in the office,” to “Welcome to our school. Please register in the office.” This helps to promote an open door policy with parents.
- Arrange to visit students’ homes for a half an hour or so soon after the year has begun either by telephone, note with a response, or email. A follow up phone call or note should be sent thanking parents for their time and kindness and reaffirming that the school cares and wants to be of assistance.
- Greet new families by sending a gift basket to their home along with letters from classmates and school event and policy information.
- Hold Back-to-School nights and Open Houses.
- Set up a morning or evening for Principal-Parent Coffee Break and Teacher-Parent lunches or breakfasts.
- Establish an orientation program for new families.
- Provide a school hotline and homework line that is available to parents.
- Have bulletin boards, community wide mailings, fliers and pamphlets, web-sites, and radio/T.V. as sources of communication to parents who are wide spread.
- Submit an article, guest column, or write a letter to local newspaper describing the event and the importance to all those involved.
- Start the year off with a picnic for students and families to learn about each other and the school.

Information to Communicate

- Communicate school policies, activities and other important information in a clear and easy to understand manner.
- If at all possible, supply all parents with the phone numbers and names of all the students’ families in their class.
- Early in the year, outline expectations and responsibilities for all those involved (teacher, parent, and child).
• Send home parent and students handbooks.
• Inform parents of good behavior or achievements through Happy-Grams.
Volunteering
Volunteering-to gather and organize parents’ diverse sources of support.

Volunteer Needs
• Provide a room or meeting place for volunteers to meet and gather for information.
• Survey volunteers as to what times they are best available and their interests.
• Using parents special talents and expertise to enrich the curriculum.
• Offer to parents who do attend workshops and who volunteer incentives such as school supplies, storybooks, and vocabulary card files.

Volunteer Responsibilities
• Have a volunteer program that assists teachers, students, and families.
• Ask for volunteers to overlook the safety and operation of school activities and events.
• Guest Reader come into class and read to the students.
• Provide classes on gardening and sewing for parents and then have them use these new skills for school improvement.
• Asking for volunteers to help in the classroom with special projects or activities, to help tutor students in need of extra help, assisting with the fine arts, or organize grade-level or school wide projects.
• Having parents come in and read to children or have the children read to them.
Learning at Home

Learning at Home—information and tips to help parents help their children reinforce the knowledge gained at school.

Helpful Information

- Distribute information on academic skills that children are expected to have mastered at each grade level.
- Make sure each parent has received information on the homework policies, ways to monitor homework at home, and how they can help their child with their homework.
- Provide a consistent homework schedule that includes activities that involve discussing and discovering learning with families.
- Send home calendars with the events that are occurring in the school and classroom.
- Send students’ work home with parent response sheet.

Activities in School

- Initiate family math, sciences, and reading activities at school that gives parents an idea as to what their children are learning.
- Allow parents to sit on class.
- Hold parent visitation days.
- Create a family literacy program.
- Plan a storytelling night for students and their families, and have children perform their favorite stories or poems.

Activities at Home

- Provide children with summer learning packets to work on over the summer.
- Promote families to get goals for their children during the year.
- Encourage parents to spend at least 20 minutes a day with their child regarding school.
- Provide parents with home learning activity ideas:
  - Watch news shows or TV shows with a map or reference book.
  - Develop arguments and role-play situations.
  - Read to each other.
- Send home with a student a book bag or backpack that contains books, a stuffed animal, and other activities that involve the family.
Decision Making

Decision Making— to collaborate with parents in a decision-making role.

- Encourage parents to participate or attend PTA/PTO and board meetings, committee meetings, or advisory councils.
- Create groups to lobby and advocate for school reform and improvements.
- Begin district wide groups that focus on parent involvement.
- Give information about local or school elections taking place.
- Create a network that links each family with a volunteer parent representative.
- Create a “Dads Club” to boost fathers’ presence in schools.
Collaborating with the Community

Collaborating with the Community—to partner up with members and agencies within the community to help students excel and to help the community grow.

Resources and Information
- Distribute information regarding community health, cultural, recreational, social support, and other programs available in the community.
- Make available information on community events that are related to academic skills or interests.
- Gather a support network that includes schools, businesses, and civic agencies.

Into the Schools
- Allow use of equipment or buildings for education purposes.
- Partner with architects, builders, and leaders of the community to help find a solution to overcrowded and outdated schools.
- Collaborate with a local college or university to begin a volunteer or mentoring program for students (all ages).
- Arrange a first-day-of-school holiday to encourage employers to give parents time off from work so they can go to school with their children that day.
- Partner with a college in the surrounding area to hold pre-college workshops or college fairs for middle and high school students and their families.
- Ask a local school board member, mayor, city council, state representative, or governor to issue a proclamation celebrating a back-to-school event and highlighting one or more of the six key areas in education.
- Hold a community back-to-school day or week and organize numerous events at numerous different times. Be sure to invite the whole community.

Into the Community
- Provide opportunities or projects that encourage children and families to volunteer in their community.
- Promote the involvement of past students in school activities and events.
- Hold neighborhood meetings.
- One night at McDonald's have teachers dress up and serve food to customers.
- Ask local businesses to offer job-shadowing or co-op experiences to high school students.
- Encourage students to participate in an art or essay contest and have local artists or writers judge the event.
The Road of Success

Creating a successful parent involvement program is not a concept that should be taken lightly. It takes much cooperation, communication, and commitment from all those involved. The largest contributing factor of success in a parent involvement program is that parents, teachers, and administrators work side by side to accomplish the same goal—helping children be successful. Without this partnership, a parent involvement program can not exist, let alone be successful.

Once the partnership between parents, teachers and administrators has been created, it will not travel the path of success on its own. Numerous factors assist to make a program lasting and successful. General planning and evaluating are precursors to success. There needs to be commitment from each person involved to making a difference for children. The participants in the partnership need to know the detailed purpose of the program and their role in the program. Not only does each group need to know what direction they are heading, but they also need to know what they are trying to accomplish by the short and long-term goals the program has set. Teachers, parents, and administrators need appropriate training and resources available to help reach the goals set. Throughout the course of the program, time should be taken to evaluate the program from multiple perspectives (Wolfendale 11-12). Before a meal can be made, the food ingredients need to be present. The planning and evaluating are the ingredients that need to be there before a parent involvement program can begin.

Once the general planning and evaluating have been accounted for, there are other factors that need to be attended to for success. Focusing on prevention, rather than
treatment, will head a program in the right direction. Activities and events, coordinated along with community organizations, should include as many members of the family as possible. Even though children are not directly involved in the team of parents, teachers, and administrators, they too can contribute to the success of parent involvement programs by recruiting and advertising for activities and events. Creating an avenue of parents as a support system will help parents to feel a part of a team. As each member involved works to make the program successful, each individual needs to be recognized for his or her hard work and dedication.

To help make parents’ involvement and efforts enjoyable and meaningful, there needs to be a variety of roles, opportunities, and time commitments available. A continuum of activities allows parents the choice to work with their schedules, interests, and talents (Burns 17). Within the continuum, different levels of responsibility should also be available for the individual parents to take part in. For example, parents should be allowed to contribute information to decision-making on all levels, not just in the role of receiving the information. Parents need to feel that the variety of suggestions begin made for involvement are to choose from. It needs to be conveyed to the parents that the school does not expect them to do it all. Parents are a school’s best ally; therefore, it is best for all to keep them informed and involved (Wolfendale 65).

To effectively keep parents informed, teachers and administrators must know what parents want to know. Parents want information on the events occurring in the school, how the school works, and how they can be involved in it and with their child. Besides information about the school in general, parents also would like to know information on how they can help their child succeed (Burns 11). Parents want
information to help them understand education so that they are able to help their child be successful.

To make the home-school collaboration to become a reality, communication is an extremely important component. Even though the act of communicating to parents does not seem like a difficult task, communicating openly, in both directions, with a personal touch makes the task of communication a little more difficult (Burns 16). Through open, two way, personal communication, it must always be stated either explicitly or implicitly that parents are important and needed (Burns 18).

There are various ways to communicate to one another. Each way has its own strengths. The most common ways of communication are face-to-face, written, and telephone communication. Whenever possible, face-to-face communication should be used. It is the most effective and has the greatest amount of personal touch possible. If face-to-face is not possible, written or telephone communication are other possibilities. Written is the most convenient, but should be clear, short, and easy to understand. Telephone communication is more convenient than face-to-face, but not as convient as written. However, it still allows a great deal of personal touch to be expressed. Telephone communication needs to be pleasant, discrete, and attentive (Jones 18). Various types of communication should be used to add variety and meet the needs of individual parents.

Through communication the school could imply the “wrong” message: “the school knows best; it is up to the parents and children to conform; and we are the professional educators,” (Burns 21). This can not occur if school-home partnerships are to be successful. Above all else it needs to be communicated to parents that they do not
have to be highly educated or have large amounts of time to make a difference and the school belongs to them too (Burns 13 and Jones 19).

When communicating to parents and families, background differences need to be taken into consideration. If there is not sensitivity towards family backgrounds, communication is made much more difficult and negative feelings will result. This leads parents feeling unwelcome in the school environment and intimidated to speaking to their child’s teacher (Burns 14). This effects the partnership that in turn effects the child.

As there are a great number of factors that influence the success of a parent involvement program, there are various ways to show the importance of the parent involvement program to a community. Written statements in district and individual schools’ policies that explain the importance of parent involvement to the students and the school. Financially supporting a parents involvement program through funding, space and equipment, planning time for teachers, and food/transportation are just a few ways this support can show value to all those involved. Supporting a program not only come from manpower and time, but monetary commitment.

Commitment from parents, teachers, administrators, and the community as whole is needed for a program to reach its ultimate potential. The life changing effect that parent involvement programs brings is success to children. However, this excellence is hard fought. It comes with periods of up and downs, but in the end the prize is worth the battle. Creating a partnership between parents, teachers, and administrators takes time. The line of division between groups takes time to blur (Burns 62). However, the need for parent involvement has never been greater (A Pocket Book 2).
Bibliography


America Goes Back to School Http://www.ed.gov/Family/agbts


My Experience with Parent Involvement

Katy Forsyth
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Send letters to teachers, give invitations to students, buy games here and rulers there, make hundreds of copies, and ...whew...the list goes on and on. Who would have ever thought, there was such a large amount of background work to a parents involvement program? It is all the work June Marlett completes that makes Woodward School for Technology and Research’s Math Family Fun Night successful. In an effort to learn more about parent involvement, Mrs. Marlett has allowed me the opportunity to observe the background work to the program and volunteer myself to help.

Of all the topic areas within the realm of education I chose to focus my thesis on parent involvement for one main reason—to help the children I work with to exceed in their desired avenues. As a teacher, I can change a child’s world while at school; however, I can not positively influence the child’s life outside of school without the support a child’s parent/guardian. For education to reach its full potential for a child there needs to be collaboration between the home and the school.

My mission became to learn as much as I can about parent involvement and parent involvement programs. As I had a variety of educational topics to choose from, I had a variety of opportunities in which to explore parent involvement. To gain knowledge of theory and application of parent involvement, I decided to explore parent involvement through a paper focused on increasing parent involvement and helping with a parent night at an area school. Through the theoretical ideas research for my paper and the application of my project, I will have experienced a well-rounded view of ideas regarding parent involvement.
The process of completing the paper and parent night project was accomplished in two different ways. Researching for my paper was an activity I was able to complete solely with a stack of research materials and a computer. However, setting up to volunteering with a parent night requires connections through many people.

Before contacts could be made, I needed to narrow down my idea of a parent night. Many schools have subject(s) specific activities that invite parents into the school. Due to the fact I have a special interest in mathematics education and the concern many parents have regarding math, I decided to find an area school I could work with to put on a Math Night. With the help of the Office of Field Studies and my thesis chair, I was welcomed into Woodward School for Technology and Research not only to help with the Math Night, but also to complete my pre-internship. Being able to complete my pre-intern experience at the same location as my thesis project gave me the opportunity to become familiar with the school's math curriculum, teachers, and students. This familiarity lead me to understand the process, progress, and people involved in the event to a greater degree.

In the early fall, I contacted June Marlett and the process of preparing for Math Family Fun Night began. Before we dug into the work, Mrs. Marlett informed me of the goal for their program. It was to bring families together and enjoy playing math games. The Math Family Fun Night was composed of two distinct parts. For the first hour families gather and play various math games taught by our student experts. After wandering around and exploring math games for an hour, the families traveled to the cafeteria for ice cream and a boardgame raffle sponsored by the Woodward's Parent/Teacher Association. Each family received a complimentary bag of math
manipulatives, such as playing cards and beans, and math games with directions for various ages and abilities.

Due to the necessary expenses for this event, the first step was to find financial support for the cost of the program. Math Family Fun Night was paid for by the PTA and a special fund that supports the math program. After financial backers were found, the detailed work began. Going through the materials from previous parent involvement events allowed me a chance to become familiar with the things that needed to be done. This led us to discussing the plan of necessary tasks to accomplish. We went to work. This included preparing invitations for administrators, parents and students. Calling, ordering, and picking up supplies such as boardgames, rulers, cards, and gumdrops for the bags to be sent home and the games played at the event was necessary. Copies of games were made and collated to put in the packet to go home. Communicating with teachers to get games, lists of needed materials, and selecting student instructors was an ongoing task. On the night of the program, the instruction posters were hung and rooms were set up with games and table and chair waiting for the guest of honor to arrive.

After an hour of exploring math concepts in a welcoming, enjoyable environment, the families moves on to the cafeteria for ice cream. The work did not end when the families moved on to eat ice cream. As soon as possible, the rooms were moved around so that they are returned to their natural state. A few days after the event, thank you notes were sent to student instructors and teachers for their preparation before the event and support during the event. Evaluations were sent around for positive comments and needed improvements to help make the next math night even more successful. This leads
to the end of the process for Woodward School for Technology and Research successful Math Family Fun Night, until the next time.

As you looked around at the children and adults playing math games, you would see hundreds of smiles as they explored math topics. This, to me, shows the successfulness of the event. The number of smiles was influenced by various factors. If I had to point to one of the most influencing components to the success of the Math Family Fun Night, it would be the large amount of communication initiated by Mrs. Marlett. Through notes and personal contacts, the lines of communication were open and clear. Letters and notes were sent home to all families to invite and inform them of the upcoming event. Teachers used both written and verbal communications to speak with Mrs. Marlett about student instructors, ideas needed, and the required materials for the selected games. Mrs. Marlett made it her responsibility to make sure everyone knew the plan and what she needed to do to help the teachers. The task of keeping communication going was not easy; however, it kept unknown surprises from popping up at the last minute. In the letters sent home to families, Mrs. Marlett made sure it included the words “invited to attend.” By placing the word “invited” specifically into the note, there can be no confusion whether families are allowed to come and it makes parents feel like they are wanted to be there. Providing free ice cream, math games and manipulatives, and the possibility of winning a boardgame, encourages people to attend because it does not have a cost and everyone leaves with something. A few days before the event, Mrs. Marlett went to each classroom and advertised the event. She mentioned fun, ice cream, math games, and the boardgame raffle. The personal sales pitch to the students helped to encourage parents to come because their child was extremely interested and motivated to
attend. Although there are many components that come together to make Math Family Fun Night successful, these ideas are key.

The great achievement of Woodward’s Math Family Fun Night did not happen overnight. Without the Math Family Fun Nights years before, the number of families and the quality of the program may have not been as strong. With each year passing, the event brings in more and more families. Practice makes perfect while preparing and presenting the event. This is one source that proves parent involvement takes time.

Successful parent involvement programs are possible, even in locations statistics say it will not happen. The work involved in implementing and preparing a program seems unrealistic to many. I guess the question should be what is our priority? If the children in our classrooms are a priority, the necessary time and support can be found to help our children’s achievement through parent involvement programs. In return, the positive outcomes for our schools and students are unbelievable.
**Math Night Resources**


“Parents as Math Partners: A Successful Urban Story” is a description of the process Linda Carey went through to help the twenty-two students in her classroom reach mastery in specific math objectives. The main influence to the students’ success was the work she did to get parents involved in the math program.


With the great course of change that math education has taken, parents need to be informed why and how math has changed. This should be done through developing a partnership between parents and teachers. Through this partnership parents, teachers, and children all experience benefits.


Another way to increase participation of parents in education is described in this article. Diane McCarty worked to create a mathematics lending library that allowed parents and children to enjoy the pleasure and educational experience of reading together while exploring mathematical concepts at the same time. This article is the story of how she did it and some ideas she used.


Trying to create a clearer picture for all involved, the author of this article works to define the purpose of involvement parents in mathematics education and what parent involvement looks like. Along with clarifying the general ideas regarding parent involvement, the six major areas of parent involvement are described.


This article describes how one community had math education become a part of their everyday life. Lower Township in New Jersey wanted to help their children become more successful in math. To accomplish this, the first Parent-Student-Teacher Coalition was formed. This group worked to create a great variety of activities to encourage math exploration and parent involvement.