FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Innovative & Diverse Strategies To Increase Family Engagement
You'd Be Surprised to Know.. I don't even own a TV!

Ashamed to Admit
I have a bit of a social networking “problem”

Favorite Job
Working with families and teachers

Phobias
Being late

Hobbies
Shopping, Blogging, Tweeting, Facebooking

Faults
Perfectionist (Just kidding! But not really!)

Retirement Dream
Somewhere in Europe... In a castle!
What is your definition of family engagement?

- How do you personally define family engagement?
- How do you think your school defines family engagement?
  - How are they similar?
  - How are they different?
FAMILY PARTNERSHIP PROGRESSION

“From Passive to Active to Empowered”

Involvement

Engagement

Empowerment

Where Are You?
WHAT IS FAMILY ENGAGEMENT?

- A well thought out process involving the entire school community, NOT a series of events.

- A set of day-to-day practices, attitudes, beliefs and interactions that support learning at home as well as at school, NOT a one-time program.
WHY EXPAND THE DEFINITION?

- When families take an active interest in their child’s learning, students display a more positive attitude toward school.

- Children learn best when their parents play a variety of roles in their learning:
  - Helping at Home
  - Volunteering at School
  - Planning their child’s future
  - Participating in key decision making

- Middle School and High School students whose families remain involved make better transitions.
THE REALITIES OF FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

- Attitudes
- Fear
- Isolation
- Assumptions
CORE BELIEFS FOR FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

- All parents have dreams for their children and want what’s best for them
- All parents have the capacity to support their child’s learning
- Parents and school staff should be equal partners
- The responsibility for building partnerships rests primarily with the school
PTA’S NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

- Standard 1: Welcoming all families into the school community
- Standard 2: Communicating effectively
- Standard 3: Supporting student success
- Standard 4: Speaking up for every child
- Standard 5: Sharing Power
- Standard 6: Collaborating with community
THE TOP TEN WAYS TO INCREASE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT
PROVIDE A WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT

◆ A family friendly atmosphere where ALL families feel welcome, included and valued
◆ Care and concern are evident
◆ Families feel they belong on the campus and want to come back

PTA connection: Standard 1
Welcoming all Families into the School Community

“A family friendly school strives to forge partnerships with ALL families, not just those that are most involved.”
STRATEGIES

◆ Acknowledge, greet and assist ALL visitors -
  ▶ “You get one chance to make a good first impression”
  ▶ Provide customer service training

◆ Make the school campus physically say “Welcome”
  ▶ appearance, parking, signs, student work

◆ Offer a variety of opportunities to volunteer

◆ Survey parents and staff to determine school climate

◆ Create a place that parents can call their own

◆ Continuous celebration of families -
  ▶ Parent Bulletin Board, Family Hall of Fame, Special Events for the whole family

Out of the Box Idea: Establish a PTA Welcoming Committee/Parent Ambassadors to meet and invite new families
AFFIRM & VALUE DIVERSITY

- Recognize and Respect **ALL** families
- View diversity as rich resources and opportunities instead of conflict and misunderstanding
- Ensure that your school parent committees reflect the entire school community

*Key Strategy to Remember!*  
*Be inclusive not exclusive!*
STRATEGIES

- Provide training to broaden knowledge and awareness of the diversity of your school
- Conduct activities and events to honor all cultures
- Utilize translators for meetings, events, etc
- Provide printed material in languages of the school
- Know how to pronounce families’ names correctly
- Explain terminology and jargon
- Utilize mentor parents to invite other parents
- Establish term limits

Out of the Box Ideas: start an outreach program, work with community members to connect families and the school
SCHOOL-COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

- Link parents to support services and resources
- Provide opportunities for families to learn about the school’s programs, teams, policies and procedures
- Encourage professional development on the importance of & strategies for family engagement

“Create an increased awareness for the entire school community”
STRATEGIES

- Share PTA standards with the entire school
- Recognize and support ALL forms of parent involvement
- Create an Action Team for Partnership (ATP)
- Develop a “Family” Handbook
- Implement Professional Development opportunities to create awareness
  - Staff
  - Parents
  - Committees

Out of the Box Idea:
Develop “Family Tool Kits” for parents on specific topics
Provide information, tools and ideas to families in order to support their child at home with:

- Homework
- Transitions
- Goal setting
- Planning for the future

PTA connection: Standard 3
Supporting Student Success
STRATEGIES

Provide parents with resources and information:

- Learning Standards in all subjects at each grade level
- Homework Policy
- School Compact – Teacher/Parent/Student responsibilities
- How to assist students with skills that they need to improve
- Calendars with daily / weekly activities for parents and students to do at home or in the community
- Summer learning packets / activities
- College/Career planning information
- Parent Center – check out materials
- “Take-Aways” linked to learning – given out at events

Out of the Box Idea: “Recipes for Home Learning” book
TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION

- Effective two way communication is essential for building school family partnerships & serves as the foundation for constructing all home-school activities
- Avoids misunderstandings/assumptions
- Informs parents of school expectations
- Informs school of parents expectations
- Increases awareness of programs / events

PTA connection: Standard 2
Communicating Effectively

“One way isn’t communication”
Contact parents at least once during the school year
  - Once is never enough!
Visibly promote upcoming school events
Update school website links regularly
  - Include PTA & other parent organization links
Communicate in languages that reach all parents
Use ALL communication channels
  - Phone calls, e-mail, notes home, flyers, newsletters, bulletin boards, school website, suggestion box, surveys

Out of the Box Ideas: Use social media in creative ways; Webinars, Twitter, Facebook, Blogging, Texting
DEVELOP A PARTNERSHIP PLAN

- Move from a Traditional-style to a Leadership-style organization
- Build leadership capacity to encourage parent involvement
- Use PTA meetings as a forum to discuss changes in school policy and improvement in student achievement
- Use surveys to determine issues
- Work with other parent groups to research school issues
STRATEGIES

Move Toward a Leadership style organization

- Vary times/places for meetings
- Plan agendas based on issues important to parents (surveys)
- Communicate parents ideas/concerns to staff
- Feature student work and performances at meetings
- Invite the whole family: offer food, child care and help with transportation

Out the Box Idea: Present proposals for school improvement to Principal and School Boards
EVALUATION

- Survey parents to determine their needs, how they want to be involved
- Regular assessment and reflection can improve your family engagement policies and practices
- The key to assessment and improvement is data and information:
  - Know how to get it
  - Know how to use it

Remember! If it doesn’t get measured it doesn’t get done!
Regularly use data and surveys to:

- Assess areas of need/concern
- Decide upon changes for improvement
- Share results with the school community
- Implement new strategies
- Share and celebrate successes!

**Out of the Box Idea:** Use a variety of school data sources: achievement, demographic, attendance, perceptual
COLLABORATE WITH COMMUNITY

Engage community members, businesses, agencies and organizations as partners to:

- Provide expanded learning opportunities
- Build broad based support for increased school funding
- Provide quality after school programs
- Address the multiple needs of families; health, economic, parenting

PTA connection: Standard 6

Collaborating With Community
STRATEGIES

- Map your community’s assets
- Partner with local businesses to host meetings and events within the community
- Invite local community members to serve on teams
- Reach out to senior citizens and church groups and invite them to volunteer at school
- Host a community breakfast at the school for local business & civic leaders – discuss ideas, issues & problems in community
- Celebrate business partnerships throughout the school

Out of the Box Idea: Sponsor a “Give Back” Day where students perform service work in the community
Families as Decision Makers:
- Help parents make informed decisions about school options and educational services

Families as Partners:
- Help parents become active partners by providing resources and opportunities to become meaningfully involved, both at home and at school

Families as Advocates and Advisors:
- Help parents become empowered to be advocates for their children by providing leadership opportunities and other training to develop their capacity to be effective advocates

PTA connection: Standard 5
Sharing Power

“An advocate is not an adversary”
STRATEGIES

Actively solicit parent participation on decision making committees:

- Compact, Homework Policy, School Improvement Plan
- PTA – ensure that membership and leadership is reflective of the school community

Promote opportunities:

- Personal invitation
- Website, newsletters, events, meetings

Out of the Box Idea:

PTA members and parents take part in staff interview process
Relationship building is critical to:

- Building trust
- Developing effective communication strategies
- Helping families and schools view one another as partners
- Increasing parent participation in activities and programs that help promote student achievement

"The first step in building lasting and effective family engagement starts with one word – RELATIONSHIPS"
STRATEGIES

- Meet face to face with each family at the beginning of the school year
- Follow up with those who don’t “show up”
- Take time to speak with parents about what they believe
- Meet families outside of the school’s formal setting
- Make positive acknowledgements at every opportunity
- Make outreach a priority

Out of the Box Idea: Create a Home Visit Team
The effects of family engagement

- The *earlier* the involvement begins, the more powerful are the effects.
- A home that *encourages* learning is more important to student academic achievement than income, education level or cultural background.
- When parents and children *talk regularly* about school, children:
  - Perform better academically
  - Tend to have fewer behavioral problems
  - Have better attendance
  - Are more likely to complete school
TEN PARTNERSHIP STRATEGIES THAT REALLY WORK!

- Meet families outside of the school’s formal setting
- Once is never enough
- Use involved parents to involve other parents
- Take time to speak with parents about what they believe
- Connect with community organizations
- Honor and celebrate all types of involvement
- Link family engagement to school goals
- Use data to assess and improve
- Utilize social media
- Create a place that parents can call their own
Sherri Wilson
National PTA
Senior Manager of Family Engagement
swilson@pta.org