

PARENT INVOLVEMENT TIPS FOR EDUCATORS --

LESSONS LEARNED FROM PARENTS WHO HAVE ATTENDED THE PRICHARD COMMITTEE

COMMONWEALTH INSTITUTE FOR PARENT LEADERSHIP

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KNOW POSITIVE ASSUMPTIONS YIELD POSITIVE RESULTS:

Assume **ALL parents** love their children. They are unavailable or absent for a variety of other reasons.

Assume **ALL children** can learn.

Assume all families want a **positive school experience** for every child. Trust them; assume they will work to ensure that positive experience from their end.

Trust begets trust. Understand that parents bring their children to school with a “sense” of trust and an assumption that educators are there because they want to help children learn. Use that trust as a starting point for developing productive school/home partnerships.

Don't assume parents understand how to help their child or to even know that their child needs help.

As a staff, **surface and examine your assumptions** about families. Avoid slipping into the “us vs. them” mode.

HAVE HIGH EXPECTATIONS for parents and know they have high expectations of you:

Expect **parents to be involved** in their child's education experience. Don't make excuses for them.

Expect all parents/families to concentrate on **being partners** with you in the education process. Expect them to understand the challenges of educating their children.

- Invite them to attend professional development activities.
- Ask parents what they need and/or want from their relationship with the school.
- Together, determine what you both want/need and expect from students.

Expect **all staff** to concentrate on being a partner with parents/families.

Share your expectations of parents and staff **with the students**, too.

Clarify expectations for parents from the beginning.

- First, though, hold staff discussions to ensure buy-in and clarity among yourselves.
- Start early and spell out to parents what the school expects them to do to help their child succeed, both in and out of school (i.e. attend parent-teacher conferences, monitor homework, turn off the TV).
- Use simple messages; repeat them over and over:
 - You must be involved.
 - Your child is more likely to succeed when you are involved.
 - We'll help you know what to do.

Prepare for parents.

- Ensure the school has a “volunteer” manual, training procedures, parking spaces, a parent room, so parents are prepared and know they have a place.
- Be specific about volunteer needs – tasks and schedules.
- Thank and recognize parents regularly.

Enlist parents to reach other parents – but don't abdicate parent involvement to one group.

Never underestimate parents' abilities. Those who may not be able to volunteer in the classroom can do other things (website design, write mini-grants, etc.)

COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE...You can never do too much:

Begin by always making parents feel **welcome**. Never underestimate the power of a smile, an open door, and a friendly greeting.

Commit to **two-way communication**. Give parents the information you need them to have as well as the information they want and need. Take time to listen to their suggestions and answer their questions.

Make **communicating a priority** from the very beginning of the school year.

- Start the year with an event where parents meet each other.
- Survey parents to determine how they need/want to receive communications.

Expect all staff to make **personal connections**.

- Get to know parents on a first name basis, use the phone, use e-mail, connect on the schoolyard, make home visits, etc.

Listen to each parent's messages about their child; they know their child better than anyone.

Commit to **regular positive feedback** with parents. Avoid the IRS syndrome: when you hear from them it's always bad news.

Report results to parents in a straightforward, honest way. This includes achievement results, audit results, fundraising results, etc. Remember, trust begets trust.

Make **parent-teacher** conferences productive and positive.

- Offer praise about their child and together develop a plan to improve the child's performance
- Consider student-led conferences.

Include parents in conversations about, and resolutions of, issues (i.e. discipline, conflict resolution, safety, curriculum changes, etc.).

WALK THE TALK... actions speak louder than words:

Laugh with your parents; make learning fun for them too.

Include parents in discussions and decisions about **curriculum**.

Be sensitive to differences and treat all with respect and dignity...from GED to PhD. Recognize and value **all cultures**.

Think about what it takes to make them **comfortable** whenever they come to school (places to sit, food, involvement with their child, etc.)

Value all families and show students their families are valued – by what you don't say as well as what you do say.

Create a **culture of partnership** with parents.