

I-6: Respectfully inform, involve and invest students' influencers

Discuss How They Can Help

Ask parents/influencers if they'd be willing to help. Suggest some specific steps that parents/influencers can take that will help their child be successful. Your students' parents and guardians have a great deal to offer your classroom. Parent/influencer participation is by no means limited to following teachers' recommendations. By collectively pooling the resources of all of your students' families, you will find that you have an abundant supply of people, skills and tools at your disposal. You will often find that your students' families are willing to go to great lengths to be a resource to your classroom.

What You Can Ask of Families

<p>Solicit information</p>	<p>Family members can supply a wide network of contacts, from both their personal and professional circles. Looking for a female doctor who works in the community? Hoping to have your students interview a first-generation American? Want to hear from someone who is the first member of their family to go to college? Keep your students' families informed of the human resources you seek so their contacts can expand your pool of options.</p>
<p>Tap into their knowledge base</p>	<p>Parents and guardians will possess varying talents, hobbies and occupational expertise that can greatly enrich and enhance your instruction. Immigrants especially will have a depth of experience and cultural knowledge that can prove invaluable in the classroom. Jobs of all types, from blue-collar construction work to white-collar corporate work can inform and educate students about different aspects of our society.</p>
<p>Help ensure home environment is conducive to learning</p>	<p>Educational expert Robert Marzano's research has shown that of family income, parental adult education levels, parental adult occupations and home atmosphere—all of which potentially affect student achievement—the home environment has the greatest impact on student achievement (<i>What Works in Schools: Translating Research Into Action</i>, 2003). This is promising, since as a teacher there is nothing you can do to change the income, education level, and parental occupations of your students' families. You can, however, work with families to make their homes more conducive to learning.</p> <p>Suggestions for Helping Families Shape the Home Environment:</p> <p>(1) Suggest ways in which families might alter their home environments to provide a more educationally promising atmosphere. Favorable home characteristics for student learning include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adults who frequently read books to children • Children who regularly read to themselves • Adults who enforce homework completion without doing the assignments themselves (more on this in the row below) • An emphasis on, encouragement for, and an expectation of attending college • An exposure to cultural events

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	<p>(2) If families don't instinctively do these things with their children, discuss their value and importance. Try to make your recommendations as specific as possible. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instead of saying, "Read to your child," specify, "Read two short books each night to your child," or "Make sure your child reads for 20 minutes per day." • Encourage parents to give their children books and magazine subscriptions. Before the holidays, you might want to send a letter home with recommendations of specific books or magazines that would be developmentally appropriate. • Instead of advising, "Expose your children to cultural events," send flyers home announcing upcoming free cultural events in your area, such as concerts, plays, exhibits, etc., or take a class trip to the local library and get every one of your students a library card to encourage parents to take their children to the library.
<p>Give specific advice on how to help (and how not to help) with homework</p>	<p>Critics argue that homework is too time-consuming, too disruptive to an increasingly fragmented home life, and too meaningless to be worthwhile. Another criticism contends that homework actually perpetuates educational inequity by rewarding those students with ample resources at home (e.g., educated parents to offer assistance, home computers, resource materials, etc.), while hurting those students who may lack those advantages. The bottom line is that there are specific approaches you must take to ensure that homework is beneficial and fair, and you will need families to assist your efforts in doing so.</p> <p>Communicate the role you expect them to play:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain to the purpose to parents. Generally speaking, homework for elementary students is less for direct academic benefit like increased achievement and more for the opportunity to refine their study habits and time management skills. • Encourage parents to help students establish a homework routine. They should select a consistent time and place (away from a TV) to complete homework assignments. Inform families that children should not work beyond their bedtime, even if the assignment is incomplete. One thing researchers all agree on is that children need sleep more than they need seven more math problems. • Teachers should explain their high expectations of student performance with parents and guardians, and should impart how important it is for family members to communicate equally high expectations to students. • Tell parents how much homework you typically assign, when it is due, the days you generally assign homework (some teacher may choose not to assign homework over holidays, for example), and the consequences for not completing homework. • Communicate to parents that they should supervise, without completing, student work. Parents should be "facilitators" of the homework process, and can and should ensure that assignments are completed. • When using homework for practice, teach families to help students keep track of their own speed and accuracy to see the tangible results of their efforts. <p>Disclaimers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be prepared to justify any assignment to your students and their families. Expect the inevitable inquiry, "Why do we/they have to do this?" and explain how the task fits into your curriculum goals, or any other direct purpose the assignment serves. If you can't justify it, don't assign it (valid assignments are those that either encourage skill training, practicing a skill to which they've already been exposed, or introduce material to lay the groundwork for new content). Research indicates that students who are

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	<p>regularly assigned meaningful homework outperform students who are given meaningless or sporadically assigned homework.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Never ask students to do something at home without absolute confidence that they have the necessary skills. Beware of falling into the perilous trap of asking students to do something they can't do, and then punishing them for failing to do it. • Take individual student needs or circumstances into account. For example, never assume that a child will have access to the Internet, a home encyclopedia or parental assistance.
<p>Help maximize the teacher's instructional time</p>	<p>There are countless ways for family members to increase the efficiency of your classroom. For example, ask them to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • prepare materials for an upcoming activity • clean up after a particularly messy lab or project • provide transportation to/from tutoring or review sessions • set up a new display in your classroom (and break down the old one) <p>Consider asking for assistance for any ask that someone other than you could be doing.</p>
<p>Solicit materials</p>	<p>In your notes home, seek out resources from students' families. Ask parents to contribute materials to which they might have easy access. The businesses for which they (or their extended friends and family) work might be a possible source of financial or material (i.e. computer software, computer hardware, supplies, etc.) support for your classroom.</p>
<p>Chaperone field trips</p>	<p>Not only will parents/influencers provide critical assistance, but their presence sends a strong message to students that their family members are invested in their education.</p>
<p>Visit your classroom</p>	<p>Again—even if they're not completing designated tasks or duties, the mere presence in the classroom of student influencers sends an invaluable message of support and family investment in students' education.</p>
<p>Coordinate investment efforts</p>	<p>When everyone in a student's life joins forces and presents a unified message, their collective power to reach a student is magnified. Help student influencers understand your objectives and your methods so that they can better tie their own positive reinforcements to students' academic effort and growth. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • coaches can make academic effort a prerequisite for playing time • parents might require 100% homework completion before allowing children to attend a special trip • families might create their own tracking system at home to gauge improvement and effort and devise their own tailored reward for students to work towards

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<p>Volunteer in classroom</p>	<p>Encourage families to volunteer as frequently as possible in the classroom. Tips:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider having set “drop-in” hours when volunteers are especially encouraged to come (like during independent reading, or math time, or group work). • Send notes home requesting help for special hands-on activities for which additional adult support would be especially helpful. • Request volunteers for classroom tasks that you simply don't have time to tackle (like re-organizing a classroom library, or setting up a complicated wall display or lab activity). • Make sure parents know your classroom schedule so they can choose to come during activities that interest them the most. • If you have ESL students who speak a language that you don't, encourage parents who speak the language to assist your efforts in the classroom (or to come teach a few basic lessons in the language to the English speakers in the class). • Give parents a list of the likely field trips you will take for the year so that working parents have plenty of notice to request time off to serve as chaperones.
<p>Tutor</p>	<p>Solicit family members to commit to a weekly or monthly tutoring time slot. Give them subject preferences. Offer both in-school and out-of-school opportunities. Consider training tutors to maximize their potential. Structure their involvement as much as possible to standardize the format and potential impact.</p>
<p>Serve as guest speakers</p>	<p>Invite family members to speak on a relevant topic they know about. Because family members' abilities may or may not be related to their current employment, teachers might invite a family member to speak about not only about their work, but also hobbies, previous jobs, or special skills. Tap the “funds of knowledge” found within the households when making plans for curriculum units in social studies, math, science, language arts, and other subjects.</p>
<p>Lead workshops for other parents</p>	<p>Enlist families to lead workshops that might benefit other parents. Maybe you've noticed that one parent excels in setting up organized study spaces at home and has established a particularly effective homework routine. Or another stands out because of her commitment to enriching her child's knowledge of culture through regular trips to museums, historical attractions and the theater. Perhaps even another has successfully sent an older child to college and obtained financial aid and could offer advice for other families about to enter the college application process.</p> <p>Families have unique skills and interests. Tap into those talents and knowledge bases, remembering: you don't have to do it all yourself.</p>