

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

Strategies for facilitating parental participation

Many families will crave participation in school activities as a way to be involved in their child's education. They will want to witness firsthand your instructional style, the curriculum content, and the classroom atmosphere. Although their presence may initially make you nervous, you will grow accustomed to classroom visitors and should eventually overcome any self-consciousness that arises. The benefits of having involved parents far outweigh the negatives. Most importantly, parental involvement signals to students that schoolwork is relevant and important.

As much as possible, encourage students' families to get involved in the day-to-day happenings of your classroom. Keep them informed about special events, but also incorporate them into the more routine aspects of life in your classroom as well. Above all, enlist parental support whenever possible.

<p>Classroom volunteers</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>Tutors</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>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>

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<p>Parent workshop leaders</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>
<p>Classroom "guests"/participants</p>	<p>Use the attraction of parents' (and older/younger siblings!) presence as a motivational tool. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many lower elementary teachers offer a weekly "Family Read" program, where friends and family members are invited into the classroom so students can read aloud to them. Students can rotate from one adult to another to take turns reading to as many adults as possible. • Students of all ages will be excited to "present" their work to an audience. Students can present speeches, essays or other culminating projects to invited friends and family. The formality of presenting work to invited guests can serve as a powerful incentive to students to do their best work. • Be prepared to find proxies for students whose families consistently do not show. For example, is there a coach, aide, older/younger sibling, close friend or other teacher in the school (like a former teacher or an art or music teacher?) with whom the student is close who might come to your room to show the student support? <p><u>Example</u> "I knew that after I was gone, it would be the parents who would have to push along their children. I had conferences with each one of my students' parents at least four times during the year. I made it very clear to them what my goals and expectations were for their children, and I communicated their kids' progress quarterly in a very detailed way. I taught them how to study with their kids and what their role was at home. On the last Friday of every month our A+ 2nd grade team (all Teach For America corps members) would have a Power Hour of Reading in which we invited all of our families to come in and read with their kids and other kids in the same grade-level. This was in an effort to reinforce the importance of literacy for our children and the communities we worked with. Their growing excitement for literature became apparent as the year progressed. Everyone loved the A+ Power Hour each month." — <i>A highly successful Phoenix teacher</i></p>
<p>Parent-Teacher liaisons</p>	<p>You may find it helpful to enlist one or two especially engaged parents to serve as a liaison between you and other families, especially if you face any language barriers. While such an arrangement does not remove your responsibility to be in active touch with all families, it can help alleviate some of the time pressures involved in doing so. Liaisons can help inform families of special upcoming events, solicit volunteers when needed, and seek both input and feedback.</p>

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<p>Committees establishing family members as decision-makers</p>	<p>Committees that formalize the roles of parents recognize the valid parental need to influence the environment in which their children spend most of their daytime hours.</p> <p>Family members and educators each have a distinctive yet interrelated role to play and each has an important voice to be heard. To encourage the role influencers can play teachers can actively and respectfully invite their students' families to join the educative process so that families and schools are both active participants in students' education. Parents and guardians need to feel that they can play an active role in shaping their children's educational experiences.</p> <p>If your school lacks such inclusive management teams, you, as a new teacher, won't necessarily be in the best position to initially create these types of school-wide committees. But you can work to offer parents and guardians as much influence as possible within your own classroom (see row below).</p>
<p>Including parents in curriculum decision-making</p>	<p>Work to offer parents and guardians as much influence as possible within your classroom. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • if you are giving students a choice about the topic of a major project, you might require parents to sign off on their choice as a way of ensuring parental input. • If you plan to utilize less common types of grading, like rubrics or authentic and performance assessments, plan a parent evening to explain your more alternative methods. For parents unable to attend, consider sending an explanation home and urging those with questions to contact you. • If you establish an ambitious academic classroom goal, you will want to inform parents of the rationale behind the goal, and enlist their ideas and support for how best to achieve it. You will also want to periodically update them on where the class stands in relation to the goal. <p>In general, you will want to inform parents and invite their feedback about any aspect of your instruction that will be either potentially confusing or controversial.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">How to Encourage Resistant Families:</p> <p>You will find that some families will be naturally less engaged than others. Given what we have learned about the importance of parental involvement, you will have to actively work to encourage these parents and/or guardians to participate more fully in their children's education. You may need to meet these family members individually to impress upon them the significance of their potential participation. If you still meet significant resistance, you might ask the child for the name of a family member who might be less resistant. But in general, it will be well worth the time and effort to recruit reluctant parents. As Carol Tomlinson (<i>How to Differentiate Instruction in Mixed-Ability Classrooms</i>, 2001) explains:</p> <p>[T]he parents who stay away are the ones we need most to invite into the child's world at school. Some of these parents stay away because school was alienating for them and returning is too difficult. Some stay away because they do not speak the language spoken in parent conferences. Some stay away because their lives are too burdened to add one more thing. We err as teachers in assuming that these parents don't care about their children's education. That is rare indeed.</p>	