

50 Ways Parents Can Help Schools

Looking for ways to involve parents to help your school? Then look no further; [click here](#) for 50 ideas. However, as most of us know, it takes more than a simple list to make a difference. Nowadays parent involvement is more than the number of times that a parent comes through the schoolhouse doors. It's much more than room mothers or chaperones or signing homework folders. The fact is that the external conditions that affect academic performance have changed dramatically over the past several years.

One of the most common shortcomings our office notices when performing an On Site Review (OSR) relates to the lack of effective parent involvement programs. Staff and administrators devote a great deal of effort and time to parent involvement, but often we find the effort is not focused in the right manner. In light of the above, the Field Services Unit provides the following suggestions to build effective parent involvement – from the partnership perspective.

Can your school or district demonstrate that it takes parent involvement seriously? Ask yourself the following questions:

- Is parental involvement included as a central element of any accountability plan?
- Is there funding and support to build the capacity of principals, teachers and parents to engage in effective parent involvement efforts designed to provide at-home and at-school support for underachieving students?
- Is there staff time dedicated to facilitating communications and engagement with low-income and non-English proficient parents with clear objectives linked to improving student performance?
- Are multiple, research-based outreach and communication strategies pursued in order to reach parents regarding student and school performance (including actions they should consider in response)?
- Are community resources leveraged in order to enhance the ability of schools to support parents and students in need?

One publication, The Center Newsletter (www.centerforcsri.org), summarizes research that identifies 5 things that schools want parents to know regarding involvement in their child's education. The 5 points are, (1) Regardless of income and background, parent involvement makes a difference, (2) Parents don't have to come to school to be involved, (3) Informed parents are a school's best partners, (4) Working together creates a better school, and (5) High-performing schools are student centered.

Another report (www.appleseeds.net) entitled It Takes a Parent: Transforming Education in the Wake of No Child Left Behind offers suggestions on how the federal government, states and schools can make parent involvement more meaningful. The recommendations relate to (A) the quality of the information that is reported to parents, (B) proactive, targeted engagement activities, (C) coherence of community support, (D) professional development and (E) working to associate key parent engagement strategies with accountability goals.

Finally, in order to develop and implement a successful parent involvement policy that reflects the research noted above, schools should develop 1 year action plans that are implemented by an action team. The action plans should address the unique needs of parents and students at each grade level or building configuration and *link* good parent involvement practices that support a child's educational and social growth **to the school and district improvement plans. Strand IV of the School Improvement Framework** (www.michigan.gov/schoolimprovement) is a helpful tool to use to analyze and develop the 1 Year Action Plans. Keep in mind that research indicates activities that involve and support learning at home have been shown to have the greatest effect on improving student achievement.

Happy partnering!