



Quality School Opportunities

DIRECTIONS FOR THE FACILITATOR

As educators, we know the importance of building relationships with our students and their families, and connecting with the communities which nurture them when school is not in session. Now that we have completed this unit on Empathy, here is an extension activity you might want to consider as a valuable next step for your school or district. This extension activity provides a variety of quality, community-facing opportunities through which educators may continue their empathy-building journey with parents, families and communities.

- The goal of this activity is for participants to become more familiar with their school’s parental engagement vision and identify opportunities to work closer with parents in an equitable fashion.
- Ask participants to read through the “Questions to Consider (Beginning)” and reflect on their current school opportunities for parent involvement. Participants may discuss collaboratively.
- Participants can then use the suggested ideas to brainstorm how to create high quality school opportunities that go beyond the typical school day.
- Participants should reflect on how parental engagement can lead to better relationships between families and schools, and help schools to create flourishing learning environments for their students.

Purpose of Improving Parental Engagement

Consider reading the following text (without citations) to participants as a way to inspire this session.

“A meta-analysis of 25 empirical studies examining the relationship between parent involvement and student academic achievement found that the factor “parental aspirations and expectations for children’s education achievement” had the strongest impact on grade point average (Fan & Chen, 2001). A meta-analysis of 52 studies found that parent involvement leads to improved class grades for students and especially to improved scores on standardized tests (Jeynes, 2007). Indeed, greater parent involvement has been shown to enhance relationships between teachers and parents, which consequently leads to parental modeling and reinforcement at home of the knowledge taught in school (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). Studies have also shown that when parents are engaged with their children’s education, parents are better able to set mutual goals and consequently partner with teachers to develop school- and classroom-level activities that parents can support at home (Christenson, 1995).”

Part 1: Questions to Consider (Beginning)

Are we inviting feedback from all families in our district? If so, are we asking the right questions to truly understand their obstacles and challenges when it comes to engaging with their child's education? Brainstorm obstacles to family engagement in your school.

- *What is your school/district vision for family engagement?*
- *Have you asked families what their concerns and priorities are? What solutions do they propose?*
- *How might you invite families to be a part of the decision making process in your school?*
- *How does the language used with family communication reflect the school's desire to engage families as equal partners?*
- *How can we use the cultural experiences of families as an asset to school events?*
- *What obstacles are in place for families that do not feel engaged in the school process?*
- *Does your school always invite families to the school setting or are there opportunities to go into the families' community?*

It is best to have the discussion prompts posted somewhere (e.g. present this [slideshow](#)).

Part 2: Connecting Empathically with Families

Name some strategies/programs that are already in place that support school faculty and staff to connect empathically with families. Then, brainstorm new strategies: don't hold back. Dream big! **NOTE: *Not all family structures are the same; please consider students with single parents/guardians, two parents/guardians, two families (due to divorce), same sex parents/guardians, parents/guardians for whom English is not the first language, etc.***

Other suggestions if these are not mentioned:

1. Parent/Guardian -Teacher Conferences: Organize regular parent/guardian - teacher conferences to provide an opportunity for parents/guardians to meet with their child's teachers, discuss academic progress, and address any concerns or questions.
2. Parent/Guardian Education Workshops: Conduct workshops on various topics such as adolescent development, effective communication strategies, study skills and understanding the curriculum. These workshops can help parents/guardians better support their child's academic and emotional needs.
3. Volunteer Opportunities: Offer a range of volunteer opportunities within the school, such as assisting in the library, chaperoning field trips, or organizing extracurricular activities. This allows parents/guardians to actively participate in their child's school life and build relationships with teachers and other parents/guardians.
4. Community Advisory Committees: Establish community advisory committees to involve parents, guardians and other community members in decision making processes

regarding school policies, curriculum development, and extracurricular activities. This gives families a voice and a chance to contribute to the overall school environment.

5. **Parent/Guardian Mentor Programs:** Create a mentorship program where experienced parents/guardians can guide and support newer parents/guardians through the middle school experience. This helps build a sense of community and provides a platform for sharing knowledge and resources.
6. **Parent/Guardian-Student Clubs or Organizations:** Encourage the formation of parent/guardian-student clubs or organizations that focus on specific interests or activities, such as science, arts, or sports. These clubs can facilitate joint projects, workshops, and events that involve both parents/guardians and students.
7. **Family Fun Nights:** Organize regular family fun nights where parents/guardians and students can engage in interactive games, activities and presentations. These events foster a sense of community and create opportunities for parents to bond with their children and other families.
8. **Parent/Guardian Workshops on Technology:** Provide workshops specifically focused on educating parents/guardians about technology use and online safety. This can include topics such as social media, cyberbullying, and responsible internet use to help parents/guardians understand and address potential challenges their child may face.
9. **Parent/Guardian-Teacher Organization (PTO):** Encourage parents/guardians to join the school's PTO or similar parents/guardians group. These organizations often collaborate with the school administration, plan fundraisers, and organize community-building events.
10. **Open House Events:** Conduct open house events where parents/guardians can tour the school, meet the faculty, explore classrooms, and gain insights into their child's daily school life. This allows parents/guardians to feel more connected to the school environment.
11. **Parent/Guardian Book Clubs:** Facilitate book clubs specifically for parents/guardians, where they can read and discuss relevant books related to parenting, education, and adolescent development. This promotes learning and dialogue among parents/guardians.
12. **Parent/Guardian Resource Center:** Establish a dedicated space within the school where parents/guardians can access resources, books, and materials related to parenting, academic support, and personal development. This provides parents/guardians with a hub of information and support.
13. **Parent/Guardian Networking:** Establish a network which allows parents/guardians a chance to form communication amongst themselves.

14. Cultural Fairs: Arrange cultural events that celebrate the diversity of the school community. Parents/guardians can contribute by sharing their cultural traditions, preparing food, performing traditional music or dance, or organizing exhibitions showcasing their heritage. These events promote inclusivity and provide opportunities for cross-cultural learning and appreciation.
15. Career Days: Organize career exploration events where parents can share their professional experiences and expertise with students. Parents/guardians from various fields can participate in panel discussions, give presentations, or offer mentoring opportunities to inspire and educate students about different career paths.
16. "Fishing for Compliments": Set up a fishbowl in the front office with fish shaped paper ballots where parents/guardians can fill out a compliment and recommendation for a teacher to be the winner for the week (or every other week). The principal will randomly draw a paper from the bowl, and that teacher will win a home cooked meal (casserole) made by a parents/guardians volunteer. After each drawing, all of the ballots will be turned into the teacher's mailboxes so they can see that someone appreciates them.
17. Parent/Guardian - Teacher Home Visits: Arrange home visits where teachers can meet with parents/guardians in a familiar environment. This provides an opportunity for teachers to gain insights into a student's home life, establish a personal connection with parents/guardians, and discuss the child's progress in a comfortable setting.
18. Social Media Groups or Forums: Create private social media groups or online forums where teachers and parents/guardians can connect, share resources, discuss educational topics, and seek advice. These platforms enable ongoing communication and foster a sense of community among parents and teachers.

19. Additional ideas

Remember, fostering family involvement requires ongoing communication and collaboration between the school and families. Providing multiple avenues for involvement ensures that families with different interests and availability can participate actively in their child's middle school experience.

Making it easier for parents/guardians:

- Provide childcare and translation services
- Organize around student events
- Go into the community for events...libraries, community centers, sports fields, religious facilities
- Events should have multiple touchpoints for communication...letters home, phone call home, social media
- Consider recording school events and making the recordings easily accessible
- Make home visits

- Focus on the positive
- Families want to know what is going on in their child's classroom.
- Ensure that communication is provided in family's Native language

Part 3: Questions to Consider (After)

1. Which family opportunities might work best for your school?
2. What opportunities already exist within your community for school to engage with families? Are there cultural festivals or fairs where the school could set up a booth and have a presence?
3. How would creating engaging family opportunities allow you to better understand the students in your school?
4. What barriers exist that may inhibit you from successfully implementing an activity you've chosen?

It is best to have the discussion prompts posted somewhere (e.g. present this slideshow).