



DIRECTOR'S CORNER

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An effective family engagement system builds connections between home and school and is an essential component to meeting the needs of each child in your program.

TIP#1 ENVIRONMENT



Parents don't come to school for a variety of reasons, but a few important ones include a feeling of intimidation, a desire to not be judged, and prior poor experiences with schools. The key is to get them comfortable with coming to school. Get the class excited about an event, like a theme night, and use them to draw parents in. I make sure to tell my students – and I abide by it – that engagement activities are not “gotcha” moments. This night is all about learning and sharing, not a time for a conference. Parents will appreciate this too! If you have to meet, use the interaction as a way to build goodwill and set a conference date for another day.



TIP#2 VIDEOS

Family engagement doesn't have to mean being physically at the school. Often parents cannot attend school day functions due to work, etc. One way to use video in the classroom is recording students explaining and modeling how to play in-class math games or complete an assignment. It gives parents a peek into the class, gives a reference video for at-home practice, and the kids love seeing themselves as teachers.

TIP#3 THEME NIGHTS



One big initiative that really gets students and parents excited is creating whole-school themed events. Selecting themes that can cross curricula, such as football, or themes that are found in all grade levels, such as money, are easy to integrate lessons and décor around. Get all teachers involved by having décor competitions. To simplify, have one or two rooms per age serve as the activity hub. Create independent work stations that show off creative problem solving and typical tasks that parents and students can do together. If the kids are excited about their themed work on display, and anticipate some fun themed activities, they will beg their parents to come to school for the big night.



TIP#4 FOOD

Repeat this mantra: If you feed them, they will come. A themed event can featured takeout meals. Parents came to school at the end of the workday, from 4:00 to 6:00 and were given tickets when they engaged in a classroom. Pre-made spaghetti meals were handed out as parents left. This eased the time required of families, but also took a planning aspect out of their night. In a low-income area, a provided meal was a welcome trade for an hour spent at school.

TIP#5 PARENTING LEARNING EVENTS



To help parents really understand the Early Learning and Development Standards create three nights throughout the year just for parents to come learn. Only one classroom and two teachers were needed to facilitate at each age level. Show how children learn through everyday experiences and how they relate to standards. Also, provide a hands-on activity for parents to try. The response can be great and fueled both confidence in families to help at home, and ask meaningful questions about how best to help students.

TIP#6 SCHEDULING



Picking times that work best for families is key to great events with high participation. If you can overcome the “not my contract hours” mentality, even Saturday morning events can be powerful. In a school where parents didn’t drive and evenings were unsafe, try and schedule events immediately after school for a few hours. Half-days, usually lost to scheduling nightmares, became morning events parents could attend before darting off to work or checking out students.



TIP#7 BREAKFAST MEETINGS

Working scheduling to your advantage, a half-day at the end of first quarter might become a perfect time to invite families in for an annual math breakfast. Many parents had the day off to pick up students early, and others were able to drop in before 8 a.m. on their way to work. Provide biscuits, bagels or muffins and then ask teachers or class parents to donate juice and fruit to round out breakfast. Parents and students played math games and worked through stations together.

TIP#8 SCHOLASTIC SUPPORT



Scholastic offers an entire family and community engagement ([FACE](#) department) dedicated to putting books in students’ hands. Sixty-one percent of low-income families have no books in their home. Literacy events can change that. A literacy event is an everything-you-need box with three books for each child, parent guides to take home so they know how to ask meaningful reading questions, ready-made rotation activities, and a guided read aloud to model on the night of the event. You can model best practices, engage families in learning activities, and send them home with everything they need to continue with their new books at home.



TIP#9 FUNDING

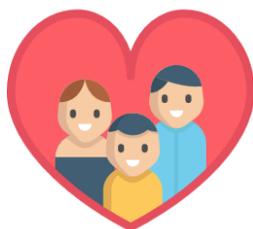
Work with local companies to help fund activities, freebies, and food. Consider that all of your meal doesn’t have to be donated from the same source: get a side at one restaurant and desert from another. Think about your partners in education. Often large companies need to make community connections and smaller companies are happy to get their name out there. Even if they can’t offer you funding this time, be sure to invite locals to your events. Getting community leaders in your school to see the impact on students is sometimes all you need. You’ll never know until you ask!

TIP#10 PARENT GROUPS



Parent advisory councils are a common strategy for involving families in school decision-making or event planning. Similar to PTAs, parent councils are sometimes called parent advisory boards, leadership councils or parent-teacher organizations. In addition to advisory councils, some schools involve families in decision-making through satisfaction surveys or needs assessment surveys.

Sometimes, these can be used to gather information about which engagement activities families support; other times, it helps the school set policy. A parent group can help plan and market certain family engagement events. The parents are involved and plan events that they WANT and ensure family involvement.



TIP#11 ALL FAMILIES ARE NOT CREATED EQUAL

You have to know your community and the types of events and resources that will be most meaningful for them. Remember that families are often more frightened than a preschooler on their first day and many come with unique backgrounds. Maybe they didn’t have a supportive and loving teacher like you and their defense is up. No matter what event works best for you, get in touch, stay in touch, and get families back into schools this year.