

Engaging Parents and Families in the After School Program

How can after school programs foster high-quality, successful parental involvement? Successful parental involvement can be defined as the active, ongoing participation of a parent or primary caregiver in the education of his or her child. Here are the following tips to engage parents and families in the after school program:

- Creating a welcoming after school program climate
- Establish effective communication between the after school program to home and home to the after school program
- Educate and provide families with information that is related to the development of the child and supports learning at home and in the community
- Strengthen families' knowledge and skills to support and extend their children's learning at home and in the after school program
- Engage families in meaningful volunteer opportunities in the after school program
- Connect student and families to community resources that strengthen and support student learning and well-being

Creating a Welcoming After School Program Climate

- Greet the parents in person as well as provide a welcome packet for all parents whose child has registered for the after school program. Include a community services directory, important school contact information, and after school calendar.
- Have after school program staff make personal contacts with families through e-mail, phone calls, or home visits.
- Hold an orientation night, prior to school opening, at which families can meet the after school program staff and teachers, tour the school building and meet other parents.
- Provide transportation to enable students to attend the after school program and family-involvement events
- Provide workshops and materials at family nights for parents on typical development and appropriate parent and school expectations for various age groups.
- Print helpful hints/suggestions for parents on home conditions that support learning at each grade level.
- Partner with local agencies to provide regular parenting workshops on nutrition, family recreation or communication.

Establish Effective Communication

- Provide printed information for parents on homework policies, on monitoring and supporting student work at home.
- Send home after school program schedules of activities and folders of student work weekly or monthly for parent review and comment.
- Develop electronic grade booklets so families can frequently monitor their children's progress. (Parent Portal).
- Clearly communicate school policies and after school program policies to all families.
- Establish formal mechanisms for families to communicate to program staff and teachers as needed (e.g., direct phone numbers, e-mail addresses, weekly hours for families to call or meet).
- Create a family "suggestion or comment" box (electronic and onsite) for families to anonymously provide their questions, concerns and recommendations regarding the after school program.

Educate and Provide Families with Information

- Provide training and materials for parents on how to improve their child's study skills or learning in various academic subjects.
- Make regular homework assignments that require students to discuss with their families about what they are learning in class.
- Provide a directory of community resources and activities that link to student learning skills and talents, including summer programs for students.
- Offer workshops or orientations to inform families of the high expectations and standards children are expected to meet in the after school program. Provide ways for families to support the expectations and learning at home.
- Engage families in opportunities to work with their children in setting their annual academic, college and career goals.

Engage Families in Meaningful Volunteer Opportunities

- Create roles for parents on all decision-making and advisory committees, properly training them for the areas in which they will serve (e.g., family nights, budgeting or program safety).
- Conduct a survey of parents to identify volunteer interests, talents and availability, matching these resources to school programs and staff-support needs.
- Create volunteer recognition activities such as events, certificates and thank-you cards.
- Establish a parent telephone tree to provide school information and encourage interaction among parents.
- Structure a network that links every family with a designated parent representative

Connect Student and Families to Community Resources

- Through school-community partnerships, facilitate families' access to community-based programs (e.g., after school programs, health care and human services) to ensure that families have resources to be involved in their children's education.
- Establish school-business partnerships to provide student mentoring. Also, they will gain experience and learning opportunities through job shadowing and internships.
- Connect students and families to service-learning projects in the community. Invite community partners to share resources at annual open houses, family nights or parent-teacher conferences.