



## Practical ways to engage parents in your school community:

### 1. Start a PTA

PTA is an established model for parent involvement that serves many schools well. This organization has national recognition and a wide variety of resources for helping students and schools. The goal is to provide a forum for dialogue between parents and teachers. In addition, PTA has a legislative presence. A representative from each school may lobby along with other representatives from around the state on issues related to children, teachers, the school and the immediate community. For more information about the Washington State PTA, click on the link <http://www.wastatepta.org/>; for information about the national PTA, see <http://www.pta.org/?gclid=CObcmsGEsZYCFQQCagodwyFgLA>.

### 2. Start a Multicultural Advisory Council (MAC)

North Thurston Schools, located in Lacey, Washington, have developed a unique model to reach parents in an ethnically diverse community. The MAC meets as a full committee once a month and is comprised of representatives from each school and students from each high school who have been hand-selected by a principal. This committee takes on issues such as addressing the achievement gap and finding ways to involve more families of color in school/community activities. The MAC also organizes a district-wide diversity day every other year and promotes local activities related to the celebration of multiculturalism. The group represents people of all nations. For more information on this council, please click the link [http://www.nthurston.k12.wa.us/education/components/scrapbook/default.php?sectiondetailid=20925&sc\\_id=1124470720](http://www.nthurston.k12.wa.us/education/components/scrapbook/default.php?sectiondetailid=20925&sc_id=1124470720).

### 3. Open a parent room

Even if your school doesn't have a formal parent organization, it is beneficial to your families to establish a parent room where they can have access to a computer, a telephone and reading materials. Although this set-up can benefit parents and families in every school, a parent room is especially helpful in urban communities where families may not own their own computers or have access to a significant work space. You could possibly enlist a volunteer coordinator to work out of this room. This parent could take 3 or 4 hours a week to make phone calls to enlist the support of parents. However, before you ask for a parent volunteer coordinator, the school staff should begin to think creatively about how they might utilize parent support when it does come (i.e. readers and listeners for struggling readers, tutors, lunch supervisors, and chaperones for dances).

## Ideas for Parent Involvement from Parents

### 1. Personal invitations

Principals and teachers, you would be amazed at the power of your words to our parents, especially parents of color. Oftentimes parents of color feel awkward coming into a school where most of the adults are Caucasian. They may be self-conscious about their use of English or feel they don't have appropriate clothes to wear. This is also the case for Caucasian parents from low socio-economic backgrounds. Every school has needs that can be filled by parents whether they have been highly educated or not. Find ways to involve your parents. Some parents may be able to serve as reading tutors. A non-reading parent could even serve as a listener for a young child. Other parents could help decorate the hallways or serve as duties on the playground. Don't wait for parents come to you. Be proactive.

## 2. Community Access Night

Create fun opportunities for parents to come to your school. Open up the library once a semester and share the students' favorite books. Have student volunteers read excerpts for the parents. Encourage parents and children to look for a book they can read together at home. Have music on and serve light refreshments. Open the art room and demonstrate fun art activities that can be done at home. Provide an opportunity for parents and children to complete an art project together that evening. Open up the gym and have a board game night. Find businesses that would be willing to donate games for families to take home with them at the end of the event.

## 3. Activities Night

Cooperate with your local parks and recreation office to put together monthly activities nights for middle school students. Each middle school could host an event. Events could consist of a dance, video games, 3-on-3 tournaments and karaoke. Charge a small entrance fee. Ask for parent volunteers, and enlist local police to be a presence. Middle school students need a safe place to hang out. If the events are just monthly, available parents will be happy to volunteer (and check out their kids).

## 4. School Improvement Teams

Almost all schools now have school improvement teams. Make sure there is always at least one parent representative on that team. Parents enjoy this opportunity to feel like they have a say in the plans a school is making for improvement. Parents are also able to see from a different perspective and can provide your group with new insights.

## 5. Social hour

Establish one day of the month (should be the same day of each month for consistency's sake) to open a room for parents, teachers and administrators to sit and have coffee together. If you are concerned about parents coming in and wanting to have a gripe session, set up topics for discussion each month to direct conversations. Have parents offer suggestions (i.e. how do I help my student with homework, which games help students develop academic skills). Parents should be encouraged to share from what has worked or not worked in their experience as well. You could even ask parents to bring food on occasion that represents different ethnic backgrounds. Give parents an opportunity to share from their gifting.

## 6. Community café

Help parents connect with one another outside the school facility. Some parents may want to interact but don't feel comfortable coming on to your campus for a variety of reasons. Create opportunities at a nearby café for parents to join one another in a relaxed setting and just talk. Don't establish any discussion topics. Just let parents mingle. Many parents are working hard and taking care of their children and don't have many opportunities to socialize with other parents who have children of a similar age. Parents who develop strong relationships outside of school will be more likely to participate in school activities once they know other parents.

## 7. New parent welcoming committee

Whether your school has a transient population or not, create a new parent welcoming committee. This committee could be run by teachers or by other parents. The welcoming committee should plan to make a home visit to all new families and be open to answering questions and providing support, especially during the first few months when a new family is unsure of their surroundings. New families should be given the contact information of one or two parent volunteers, as well as important contacts amongst the staff. New families should also be given any information related to afterschool activities and clubs in the area (i.e. boys and girls club, boy scouts, girl scouts, parks and recreation). The Center for the Improvement of Student Learning's website [www.yourlearningcenter.org](http://www.yourlearningcenter.org) also has documents you could print and put in a newcomer's packet. Be creative. What would you want to know about if you were new to a school?