

TATS eUpdate
Family Involvement
Ideas for Getting Families Involved
January 2008

Best Practice:

Research has shown that having involved families increases positive outcomes for children, but how do you get them involved? How do you get them to school, or get them involved at home? Many factors impact on family involvement in school – families’ cultural views about participating in school activities, lack of educational background or skills families feel they need for interacting with teachers and staff, or uncomfortable feelings about schools based on negative experiences family members may have had when they were students themselves. Time restrictions also effect involvement - both parents working, or a single parent balancing work time and other commitments with involvement in their child’s school. These factors may make family involvement in school more challenging. Teachers around the state are using creative ways of involving families. Here are a few ideas from teachers in Indian River, Polk, Citrus, and Volusia counties. If you are a teacher reading this, try one or adapt it. If you are a family member or a parent, suggest one to your child’s teacher.

- Let family members stay with their children at breakfast. It gives them a chance to meet other families and their child’s friends and can be done on the way to work.
- Bucket of favorite things. Children take turns taking an empty bucket home from school. Taped on the bucket are some questions – What is your favorite bedtime story? Who is in your family? What is your favorite snack?, etc. The child and family fill up the bucket with objects that answer the questions and bring it back to school to share.
- All About Me Plate. Send each child home with a paper plate and instructions that this is a family project which involves decorating the plate to reflect who the child is. Creativity is encouraged and representations can include favorite colors, items, foods, places, people, etc. Also suggest they include interests and talents of the child and a picture and t the child’s name prominently displayed on the plate. Let then children talk about them, then display them in the classroom.
- Valentine child. Send the child home with a large red heart, an index card, a few small heart decorations and directions that the family make a Valentine with the child and include 3 reasons why the child is loved on the index card. The card and decorations are put on the large heart and the decorated heart brought back to school for display. Read the messages on the cards to the children every day.

- Gingerbread Houses. Invite family members to school to build gingerbread houses with their child. Send out a “save the date” to families at least a month before. Consider doing this after school or at night as well as during the school day. When Gingerbread House Day arrives, have a workstation prepared and labeled for each child/family team. Make sure the workstations have the necessary supplies – graham crackers, icing, a variety of candy, cereal, pretzels, tools for building the house (tongue depressors, spoons, pastry bags, etc.), and a foil covered cardboard base. Take pictures of the process and a final child/family picture with the house.

Reflection:

1. Teachers - Try thinking outside the box when involving families. Ask them for some suggestions of ways they would like to be involved.
2. Take time to contact them at least once with something positive to say about their child.

If the family were a fruit, it would be an orange, a circle of sections, held together but separable - each segment distinct. - Letty Cottin Pogrebin

References and Resources:

Blue-Banning, M., Summers, J., Frankland, H. C., Nelson, L., & Beegle, G. (2004) Dimensions of family and professional partnerships: Constructive guidelines for collaboration. *Exceptional Children*, 70(2), 167-184.

Christenson, S. L., & Sheridan, S. M. (2001). *Schools and families: Creating essential connections for learning*. New York: Guilford Press.

Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) – Early Childhood Research Institute

Identifies, evaluates, and promotes effective and appropriate early intervention and preschool practices for children and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Resource bank for effective materials and strategies.

<http://clas.uiuc.edu/aboutclas.html>

Dunst, C.J. (2002). Family-centered practices: Birth through high school. *The Journal of Special Education*, 36(3), 139-147.

Family Involvement Network of Educators (FINE)

Part of the Harvard Family Research Project. The work of the Network includes increasing teacher and administrator preparation in family involvement and community partnerships; dissemination of assessment methods in family involvement programs and training models; and highlighting opportunities for families and schools to participate in design and implementation of teacher preparation programs. Much current information on school/teacher/family partnerships is available through their resource link.

www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/fine.html

PACER Center

Created by parents of children and youth with disabilities to assist other families and is staffed primarily with parents of children with disabilities. It has extensive links and information to family involvement in school and the education system for children and youth with disabilities. www.pacer.org

Partnership for Family Involvement in Education

One component of its mission is to ‘increase opportunities for families to be more involved in their children’s learning at school and at home.’ Partner organizations work with postsecondary institutions and local schools to develop teacher preparation and professional development opportunities in family involvement. www.pfie.ed.gov

Sandall, S., Hemmeter, M.L., Smith, B.J., & McLean, M.E. (2005). *DEC recommended practices: A comprehensive guide for practical application in early intervention early childhood special education*. Longmont, CO: Sopris West.

Technical Assistance and Training System (TATS)

Statewide project providing technical assistance and training to programs in Florida serving prekindergarten children with disabilities. Website provides information and resources on curriculum and instruction, evaluation and assessment, family involvement, inclusion, program effectiveness/quality, and transition, as well as, linking early childhood partners.

www.tats.ucf.edu

Turnbull, A. & Turnbull, R. (2001). *Families, professionals, and exceptionalities: Collaborating for empowerment* (4th ed.) Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Ulrich, M.E., & Bauer, A.M. (2003). Levels of awareness: A closer look at communication between parents and professionals. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 35(6), 20-24.



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