

Ideas on Best Practices for Parent Involvement

Volunteering

- At the beginning of the school year, send parents a survey regarding their interests and hobbies, ask if they would be interested in volunteering in the school. Keep the surveys to refer to throughout the year.
- Ask a parent volunteer to help with the school newsletter. Invite parents to contribute articles on parenting using their real life experiences.
- Ask parent volunteers to cook for parent events, showcasing their own specialties. Hand out copies of the recipes. As a fundraiser, schools could sell a recipe book created by parents and students!
- Ask a school volunteer to welcome parents at school events.
- Hold parent trainings on volunteering and protocol. (i.e. confidentiality issues) at the school.
- In order to make volunteering more meaningful, fit the volunteer's strengths to the tasks.
- Display information regarding volunteering opportunities in the school's parent resource center.
- Provide childcare for parent events by utilizing student volunteers.
- Ask a parent volunteer to review the existing parental involvement policy to make sure it is 'parent friendly'.
- Ask parents to volunteer as lunchroom monitors.
- Have "experienced" school parents help the newer ones make the transitions into the school.

- Have a parent volunteer in the entryway of the school at bus times to welcome parents into the school. Parents can inform other parents about teacher responsibilities during that time so parents are aware and can contribute in a helpful way.
- Hold an Open House for parents, include a workshop on parent involvement and provide handouts listing the benefits of being 'involved'.
- Ask parents to share fun activities that they do at home with their children to encourage learning. Post them in the classroom and school newsletter.
- Celebrate your parent volunteers!

Communication

- Send home learning activities that relate to your child's curriculum so that parents can help their child at home.
- Advertise school events and parent workshops on your local cable network.
- Go where the parents are! If parents are at sports events, ask if you can advertise important school activities at half time. If you have something special you want to hand out, go to the grocery store and see if you may place an advertisement in the grocery bags. One school used children's artwork on grocery bags to advertise an upcoming event.
- Have students personally invite parents to events with a hand written invitation. They may also want to provide treats for the parents.
- Have a suggestion box at the school or via the Internet, ask parents to give ideas on better ways to reach parents and get them more involved.
- Create a school or classroom calendar for parents with scheduled school events and testing dates, along with holidays and school vacations.
- Make sure all communication is parent-friendly and jargon free.

- Create a dictionary of educational jargon. Give a copy to parents and students at the beginning of the school year.
- Create a program of study for the classroom so parents know what to expect during the school year.
- Hold an Open House for parents, welcome them and introduce them to staff. Provide handouts on ways to communicate with your child's teacher.
- Ask for parents' e-mail addresses and use the computer as a form of communication. Many people prefer this method of communication.
- Design a school web page that parents can easily access. Remember to update it regularly!
- Use the telephone. Call parents with positive information about their child.
- A weekly newsletter is a great way to keep everyone informed. Student, educator, and parent contributors are welcomed. Ask parent volunteers to help type, edit, etc.
- Hold a workshop or facilitated discussion for teachers and parents on communicating with each other. Invite an outside/neutral person to facilitate.
- Make sure school signage is welcoming to parents. Look at wording of the "*visitors report to the office*" sign to see if it is parent-friendly.
- Use student planners that go back and forth between home and school as a place for parent/teacher to communicate.
- At the beginning of the school year, clearly communicate the expectations for students. Ask parents how they would like to be involved.

Learning At Home

- Use local cable television for parenting workshops.
- Hold interviews with staff on the local cable network so that parents can get to know them better.
- Provide parents with tips on how to help with learning at home. Post them in the classroom and school newsletter.
- Help to prepare incoming parents for transitions by sending home information about expectations.
- Give parents samples of upcoming assessments.
- Tell parents about the Maine Department of Education website and encourage them to get a copy of the *Learning Results*.
- Maintain a family resource center in an open accessible space with free educational materials for families. Make the space welcoming. Use this space for a bulletin board with information on testing, *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB), etc.
- Give clear, understandable information to parents regarding standards and assessments.
- Before parent teacher conferences, have the Maine State PIRC present the "Preparing for Parent/Teacher Conferences" workshop to parents. To schedule a workshop, call Maine Parent Federation at 1-800-870-7746, and ask for the Maine State PIRC project.

Parenting

- Offer parents transportation and child-care if possible, so they can attend school events.
- Provide a meal at special school events so parents don't have to cook that night.
- Make home visits to parents. Let parents know about existing local resources and parenting programs that offer home visits for younger children.
- Create social events for parents and children that aren't at school. Go to Barnes and Noble, McDonald's, the library . . . pick places where children can play while adults talk and then they all can do activities together.
- Hold a 'Back to the Future' Night. Invite parents in to tell children about what school was like for them when they went to school. Have parents dress in the style of the time with a question and answer night and a discussion about the differences between then and now.
- Talk to the school social worker/guidance counselor who may have insight into what makes parents comfortable and best ways to reach them.
- Have a Dad's night or Mom's night, at the school.
- Create a meaningful, working school-parent compact with the expectations of student, parent, and teacher clearly defined. Post this in a prominent place.

Collaborating With The Community

- Create a calendar of community events for families on your school website and/or in your school newsletter.
- Work with existing resources such as Headstart, Adult Education, and Community Colleges.
- Host neighborhood walks around your town to get to know the community.

- Hold theme literacy events at the library in collaboration with the school.
- Host a field trip to a business or agency for students.
- Have community members or university students tutor/mentor students at the school or another site after school.
- Invite a community member in to be a guest speaker at the school.
- Create an action team for school-business partnerships in order to form better partnerships with local businesses or agencies.
- Ask local businesses to sponsor activities or opportunities for students. Ask if they will provide materials or incentives for students.
- Collaborate with after-school programs, i.e. the Boys and Girls Clubs or the existing YMCA programs.
- Partner with local theater groups, artists, or any musical, dance, or writing groups.
- Make sure that information about school events is included in local community and business letters.

Decision Making

- Have parents participate in staff development/trainings on ways to better communicate with parents.
- Educate parents about NCLB and what it means for their child. Teach parents about standards and assessments.
- Make sure information provided to students and teachers is also available to parents, so parents are included as partners.
- Hold leadership trainings for parents so schools can keep and maintain good parent involvement and pass those skills on to other parents.

- Let parents know the teacher's schedule and encourage parents to observe their child's classroom.
- Create a parent advisory board, make sure to invite a diverse group of parents.
- Along with a school newsletter, publish a district-wide newsletter.
- Hold discussion groups and parent education nights with information on different topics. Survey parents to find out what information they would like to have.
- Encourage parents to run for School Board.
- Give out copies of Maine Learning Results to parents so they know the standards that are being set for their child. To view the Maine Learning Results go to [http: www.maine.gov/education/lres/lres.htm](http://www.maine.gov/education/lres/lres.htm) or call the Maine State Department of Education for a copy at 207-624-6600.
- Create a welcoming Family Resource Center with free educational materials for parents. Put out the latest school information. Post a copy of the school/parent compact [here](#).

The Maine State PIRC is a project of Maine Parent Federation, Inc. We offer support, information and referrals to parents and families statewide. Our Regional Parent Involvement Coordinators work directly with schools to develop school/parent/community partnership programs. To learn more about Maine State PIRC and other services provided by Maine Parent Federation, visit our website at www.mpf.org, call toll-free 1-800-870-7746, or 207-623-2144, or write to Maine Parent Federation at, P.O. Box 2067 Augusta, ME 04338. Email address: parentconnect@mpf.org.