

## BEST PRACTICES FOR ENGAGING PARENTS IN SCHOOLS

Parent engagement is an important foundation for all schools. One way to promote parent participation at schools is to present Parent Workshops for all parents and family members. Whether you choose to use one of the Healthy and Ready to Learn Resource and Training Center workshops or you create your own, these strategies will help ensure the parent engagement event is a success.

### POSITIVE APPROACH

When working with parents and families in your school, it is always important to keep a **strengths-based approach** in mind. It is important to recognize the strengths and expertise of each family member. Placing a focus on how parents are positively contributing to their child's education will help encourage them to continue creating positive changes in their families and school community.

If the event is taking place at a time that children are not in school, invite parents to bring their child to the workshop. You can include child-parent activities during the workshop, like arts-and-crafts.

### OUTREACH

Using **multi-methods of recruitment** can help parents recognize and remember the event being held. Sometimes, an individual needs to see an announcement through different channels to be prompted to attend. Examples of recruitment methods include:

- **Create invitations** that describe the parent workshop. On the invitation, be sure mention the workshop topic and any special activity planned (like raffles). The invite should be available in different languages, depending on your school's population. Use welcoming language!
  - Hand out invitations during student drop-off and pick-up. This will also allow you an opportunity to answer any questions parents may have about the event.
  - Send invitations home before the event. It is best to send a flyer out 2 or 3 times to encourage parents to attend.
  - Have invitations available in the main office and at all parent meetings occurring in the school.
  - If your school has an email list, send the invitation out to parents' email addresses.

- Ask parents who you have a good relationship with to tell their friends and fellow parents. **Word of mouth** is an important communication tool that parents use frequently.
- If your school has a text messaging service, send a text to parents to remind them to attend the event.
- Use your school's robo-call system to encourage parents to attend the event.
- Include event information in any school-wide newsletters sent home to parents.

## INVITING SPACES

The **physical environment** where you hold the parent workshop should be friendly and inviting for all participants. Make sure parents are clear on where the event is taking place. Providing beverages and snacks is always appreciated by attendees. Some workshops can be held in auditoriums or large rooms. However, workshops that require small group discussion and activities should be held in a classroom or smaller room. This helps ensure there is a connection between the presenter and attendees.

## PARENT WORKSHOP FACILITATION

- Facilitating parent workshops requires **preparation and understanding of the content being presented**. Make sure to read all facilitator notes, lesson plans, and go through the presentation a few times. Try to anticipate questions that parents may ask you!
- Have a **sign-in sheet** that asks parents for both a phone number and email address. Having different methods of contact may be helpful for future parent engagement.
- **Knowing your audience** (their general age, gender, education level, religion, language, culture, and group membership) will help you tailor your workshop to the audience you will have in front of you. It will inform you of what words to say when communicating your message, what language to speak (have a translator if necessary), what food/beverages to have during the workshop, what reading level your handout materials should be, what is the best way to provide/present the information you want to tell your parents, what is the best location (room, auditorium, small classroom setting) to best deliver your workshop, and more. Knowing your audience will help you discover information that you can use to build trust between you and your audience.
- **Start with an ice breaker!** An ice breaker can be as simple as asking your parents their name and how many children they have. You can also ask a question that is relevant to your topic.

- Leave time for an **open discussion** about the topic. You can do this at the beginning of a workshop to introduce the topic or at the end.
- While parents are talking, use **active listening skills** with your parents in the workshop. Eye contact, paraphrasing, and open-ended questions will encourage parents to participate. Highlight strengths of the parents whenever possible and share strategies for dealing with parent workshop topic. It is sometimes helpful to also share challenges and how to overcome them.
- Have some **paper copies** of the presentation and any accompanying materials available for parents. This provides an opportunity for parents to bring home information and take any notes.
- **Thank parents** for attending and for their participation. Hand out business cards or share contact information so parents can reach you with any follow-up questions.
- **Follow-up** with all attendees within one week of the workshop. Allow them another opportunity to ask questions or use it as an opportunity to strengthen your relationship.

“At the end of the day, the most overwhelming key to a child's success is the positive involvement of parents.”

- Jane Hull