

Education is not a solo adventure. Educators, students, and parents are all important stakeholders who have insightful input to share. The key is to find effective ways to open the lines of communication, share ideas, and lead together. Fostering parent engagement is essential for ensuring a successful partnership with parents.

Go beyond informing parents—Engage parents!

Informing Parents	Engaging Parents
Teachers present at all parent events.	Students conduct demonstrations and engage parents during parent events.
Communication comes from generic email blasts.	Communication is relevant, personal, and often co-created with parents.
Content on the school's website is created by school administrators.	Parents have a dynamic voice on the school's website.
Volunteers coordinate fundraising activities.	Parents are involved with planning how to use funds.
Schools tell parents their ideas.	Schools listen to parents' insights.

To Engage Parents ...

Meet parents where they are. They may not be able to meet at your school. Hold parent meetings at various locations in the district, ensuring there will be one close to each family at some point during the year. Have parent meetings after, and at the location of, a school sporting or drama event. Some parents may not be able to get to the school in the evening. Schedule coffee conversation hours in the morning, before some parents leave for work.

Recognize the value in delegating. When a need is identified, allow willing parents to create solutions. For example, parents at one school noted how their children were very interested in the upcoming election. They approached the principal about the possibility of providing students with the opportunity to register to vote. The principal approved the proposal and asked the parents to arrange it. Several parents spearheaded the effort and coordinated the entire voter registration drive. Delegating is not about getting work off of your plate—it is about inviting others to join the effort and giving them a voice. There are appropriate times to check in, of course, but be willing to allow capable individuals to use their voice and vision to make a difference.

Find out what matters to the parents at your school. *What do they want?* Ask parents about which topics and in what ways they want to become involved. *What do they need?* There may be parents who are incredibly eager to share their ideas, but are unsure of how to do so. Create a variety of opportunities, from casual conversations to scheduled meetings to committee positions, so that parents have a range of opportunities to become involved at a level they are comfortable with.

At the core of voice is the understanding of the unique strengths and needs of the stakeholders in *your* school community. It is essential to ask parents what they can offer, what they need, and what approaches are most productive for addressing both. Just as students are a critical resource for determining how you can best meet their needs, asking parents how you can best collaborate with them to support their children is the most effective approach to fostering student success.

Parent Voice: Listen, Learn, Lead

When parent voice is supported and feedback is valued, parents begin to trust that their voices do matter. At the end of the day, the underlying trust and mutual respect allow schools, students, and parents to listen to each other, learn from the dialogue, and lead together with a shared purpose—the students.

Listen: Questions to Ask

- What can teachers and the school community learn from parents?
- How can we better communicate with parents?
- Where, when, and how is it most convenient for parents to share their ideas?

Learn: Personal Reflection

- How do I learn the needs of my students' parents?
- How do I involve parents in students' goal setting?
- What meaningful roles do parents have in my school?

Lead: Take Action with Others

- Communicate with parents in more than one medium (e.g., phone, email, website).
- Create space for parent messages and information on the school's website.
- Invite parents to be part of specific decisions at school—not just token roles on committees.