



Ways to Engage the Reluctant Parent

Drawn from many resources, the following have been suggested to and/or used by school personnel to involve families:

Do you see parents/families as a resource? According to Edwards (1992), power means resources parents have and need to recognize, and our goal is to help parents maintain a sense of power, dignity, and authority in rearing their children. Empowerment is an intentional, ongoing process centered in the local community; it involves mutual respect, critical reflection, caring, and group participation through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over resources. Critical elements include inclusion and a sense of power in decision making.

Are roles and responsibilities negotiated?

- Explain the importance of family influences for children's learning
- Expect parents to be involved
- Clarify how parents can help (e.g., options)
- Encourage parents to be assertive; do not mandate how parents should help; let parents select

Have you reduced home-school barriers? According to Chavkin (1993), some ways to reduce barriers include: (a) have contact with parents before children /adolescents begin school; (b) have contact with parents early in the school year; (c) establish ongoing communication systems that include good news as well as sharing of concerns with a way to dialogue and share resources to address concerns; (d) use two-way communication formats: telephone, home visits, assignment/communication notebook, community liaisons; and (e) focus on the knowledge and interests of individual families (e.g., explain the importance of their involvement and ask them how they want to contribute to the school/classroom and their child's learning).

Have you created a spirit of cooperation with the purpose of meeting children's needs?

Cited by Edwards (1992, p. 224; from Hobson, 1979, pp. 44-45), five essentials of parent involvement for school personnel that should be attended to for all families, but particularly ethnically and culturally diverse families are: (a) explore with families what they want schools to accomplish, (b) devise opportunities for involvement that parents see as practical and meaningful, (c) reach out to parents with warmth and sensitivity (over and over), (d) develop an ongoing training program in which parents and staff are both teachers and learners, and (e) acknowledge that sharing power with parents is not abdication of one's

professional leadership role. Rather it provides an opportunity to understand the interests and goals of parents, and to learn ways to achieve them.

Have you considered these strategies?

- Multiple efforts, eliminating stereotypes, and changing school practices
- Use of welcoming strategies (e.g., personal invitations in native language, translators)
- Planned for logistical barriers (e.g., daycare, transportation)
- Invite parent assistance/input for addressing school-based concern; keep focus of interaction solution-oriented (i.e., what can we do to foster child's progress?)
- Make events fun (e.g., raffles, contests) and meet a family need (e.g., meals)
- Use community outreach (e.g., meet in neutral sites, home visits)
- Identify a powerful parent who will spread good messages about the school
- Identify why parents are not involved
- Examine procedures for recruiting
- Develop meaningful roles for families (e.g., build on home experiences in classrooms, parent expertise, such as co-leader for a workshop)
- Explaining to parents that if they choose not to be involved, the teachers will continue to work hard to teach their children. However, the children may make less progress because they are not practicing outside of school. They have less opportunity to learn.

Have school communication practices been examined?

- Is communication presented as a two-way, reciprocal, shared responsibility?
- Are avenues clearly open for families to initiate contact if they have an idea, question, or concern (without being perceived as a problem parent)?
- Under what circumstances do individuals feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and ideas?
- Do our interactions with parents currently elicit and openly value their input (i.e., use their input)?
- How often, and under what circumstances, do interactions occur between educators and families that foster the development of a positive, working relationship? When are we unsuccessful? What factors characterize our positive and negative contacts?

Source: Christenson, S. L. (2004). Working with Families for Student Success Module. University of Minnesota, College of Education and Human Development, Summer Institute.