

Ideas staff can use

to promote parent involvement

Email,
or post on your
intranet site, all or parts of
Ideas Staff Can Use
for your entire staff!



Promote reading achievement using parent & child activities

Improving students' literacy skills is the surest way to improve their performance on standardized tests. Parents have a critical role to play. Here are four ways to involve parents in motivating their child and building literacy skills:

1. Get caught reading. Tell students and parents that this will be a special reading month. Ask them to read to (or listen to) their child each night from 7:00 to 7:30. Tell them that if you call their house and catch them reading, they will earn a special surprise (perhaps a new book). As you call families, ask the child to read a few sentences of the book. Be sure to make an effort to catch every child in your class by the end of the month.

2. Try a reading passport. For a unit on geography, create "passports" out of construction paper. Have the children decorate their covers. Then each time a child reads a book about another country, ask the parent to sign the passport.

3. Invite parents to a reading breakfast. Before school, invite parents for muffins and coffee. While they eat, demonstrate how they can read aloud to their child, stopping to ask questions.

4. Send home a story starter. Before the weekend, send home the first sentence of a story. Challenge families to work together to create an exciting ending to the tale. Then post them on your class website or include them in your newsletter.

Source: Evelyn Beck, "Focus on Literacy: How Parent Groups Help to Build Reading Skills," PTO Today, www.ptotoday.com/0804literacy.html.

Communicate with praise & problem cards

By now parents may have forgotten things they heard during fall conferences. Praise and problem cards can give them a reminder.

Get some small index cards. Two different colors is ideal—perhaps bright yellow for praise cards and light blue for problem cards.

At the top of each praise card, write the word "Strength." Then add a brief note about a positive aspect of a child's behavior. For instance, "Helps others" or "Turns in all work on time."

At the top of problem cards, write "Area for Growth." Write about an area of concern. For instance, "Michael needs to read instructions more carefully." Or, "Maria needs to remember to put everything she needs for school in her backpack."

Make sure there are more praise than problem cards. Then at a follow-up parent conference:

- » **Present and discuss** all the positive cards.
- » **Present the problem cards.** Ask the parents to work with you to help their child improve. Suggest learning activities and study strategies they can use at home.
- » **Review the positive cards again.** Suggest that they display them on the refrigerator or in another visible place.

SOURCE: M.C. Gore and John F. Dowd, *Taming the Time Stealers*, ISBN: 0-8039-6844-2 (Corwin Press, 1-800-818-7243, www.corwinpress.com).

questions and answers

Q: Many of the students in my class come from families who do not speak English. I know some of the parents *want* to help their children with schoolwork, but they are afraid they'll slow down their children's English learning. What can I do to help them?

A: Most of the families who come to this country are here because they want a better life for their children. That's a great goal, and it can give you a chance to build common ground with those parents.

Immigrant parents need to know there are things they can do to help their children. Studies show that giving homework help in their native language will not slow down the time it takes for their children to learn English. Parents may still want to read books in their native language. They can also encourage their children to read aloud to them.

Invite parents into your classroom so they can see how you work with their children.

Parents often don't know what to do to help with homework. Invite parents into your classroom so they can see how you work with their children. That way, you can show them tips on ways they can help.

Try to plan some assignments that children can do with their parents. This month, you might ask them to talk about holiday memories or traditions. Your students could even compile their stories into a book they give their parents.

For more research on this subject, you can find Alice Salinas Sosa's article in the *Bilingual Research Journal*: <http://brj.asu.edu/archives/23v21/pdf/ar9.pdf/>.

—Kris Amundson
The Parent Institute

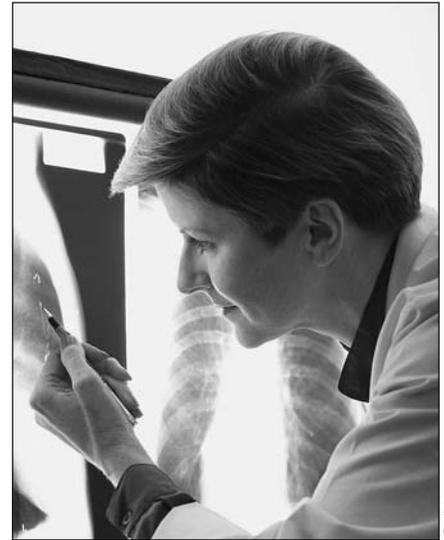
Invite community members to share their expertise at events for families

Looking for ways to get more parents into your school and involve the community at the same time? The principal and staff of **Paxtonia Elementary**, a suburban K-5 school in **Harrisburg, Pennsylvania**, start out the year by putting out the welcome mat.

Led by National Distinguished Principal **Susan Kegerise**, they provide monthly activities that make school-community activities regular events on their school calendar.

Here are a few of the programs Kegerise and her teachers have started that make getting involved a priority:

- » **After school clubs.** January and February are “club months” at Paxtonia. It's a time when teachers, parents and other members of the community share their talents with students in a fun and relaxed atmosphere. Earlier in the year, notices are sent out soliciting leaders for the clubs. Topics covered are wide-ranging and include soccer, science, pet care, chess, rocketry and drama.
- » **International days.** For three days in March, the focus turns to the traditions and culture of another country. Each year, parents and community members work together to produce an event that shines the spotlight on



a different country represented in the school population. The focus is on dance, art, drama and—of course food—from the featured country.

- » **Science night.** Science night at Paxtonia is the ultimate community event. Children and parents are provided with passports that lead them through a series of science activities taught by an array of community professionals: pediatricians (x-rays), veterinarians (animal care), astronomers (star gazing) and law enforcement officers (finger printing).

SOURCE: “Ideas That Work: Successful Programs and Practices from the 2003 National Distinguished Principals,” National Association of Elementary School Principals, 1-800-386-2377, www.naesp.org.

Ideas staff can use Elementary Edition to promote parent involvement

Published monthly September through June by The Parent Institute®, a division of NIS, Inc., an independent, private agency. Equal opportunity employer.

Copyright © 2006 NIS, Inc.

For subscription information call or write: The Parent Institute®, 1-800-756-5525, P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474. Fax: 1-800-216-3667.

Or visit our website at: www.parent-institute.com/isu.

Subscription Rates:

One-year Subscription Rates (in U.S. funds):*
Individual Subscription—\$129 for Elementary Edition or Secondary Edition; \$179 for both.

Bulk Subscription—any combination of Elementary and/or Secondary Editions billed & mailed to one address. 10-20 subscriptions—\$20 each per year; 21-50 subscription—\$15 each; 51-100 subscriptions—\$12 each;

101-200 subscriptions—\$10 each; 201-500 subscriptions—\$5 each; 501+ subscriptions—Call for Pricing.

Ready-to-Reproduce Subscription—School Building—\$327 one edition, \$491 both editions; Sm. District (up to 2,500 students)—\$547 one edition, \$821 both editions; Med. District (up to 25,000 students)—\$767 one edition, \$1,151 both editions; Lg. District (over 25,000 students)—\$987 one edition, \$1,481 both editions.
Regional Education Service Agency—Call for Pricing.

*For one full year from the date we receive your order.

Reproduction License: Purchasers of Individual and Bulk Subscriptions may reproduce electronically or in print, with credit to *Ideas Staff Can Use*, up to four articles from each issue of the newsletter for use in school building or local school district/agency publications or intranet sites. Ready-to-Reproduce subscription purchasers may reproduce the entire newsletter in print or electronically within their school building or school district/agency.

program profile

Develop teacher teams to take learning ideas to parents at home

The idea of teachers making home visits to the parents of their students is not a new one. However, it is an idea that is being revisited in many school districts across the country.

According to research, home visits help teachers by providing them with valuable insights into their students' lives, backgrounds and special needs.

When teachers make the effort to visit with parents in their own homes, they are more likely to view teachers as committed and caring individuals and to understand why it's important for them to get involved and support their child's education.

Funding for home visit programs comes from a number of different sources—the district or school, Title I, state grants, local service groups such as Rotary International and

other community and charitable organizations.

A home visit program supported by the Kalish Foundation involves six public schools in **St. Louis, Missouri.**

This local family foundation has a special interest in improving literacy. It provides support by paying teachers for the time they spend visiting the homes of their students as well as for the time they spend participating in family nights at their school. The schools were chosen because of low test scores and a need for increased parent participation.

The St. Louis teachers noted that parents who had been visited in their homes were more likely to attend school functions for parents. And

the children of these parents were more likely to complete their homework and show responsibility in the classroom.

Large or small, school-based or district-wide, home visit programs have proven to be an effective way to bridge the gap between home and school. Try putting a home visitation team

together in your school.



SOURCE: Trisha Howard, "Home visits by teachers pay off in the classroom," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, www.stltoday.com/stltoday/news/stories.nsf/education/story/267B9C0A08794D8886256F7E0037C3D3.

Here's how to make it work for you:

Begin by recruiting a small group of teachers or other staff members who are willing to plan and organize a home visit program for your school. While your program will reflect your school's unique situation, here are some common elements your planning team will need to consider:

- 1. Determine the Purpose.** Discuss the desired outcome of the visits. Most home visits last anywhere from 30-90 minutes, depending on the goal of the visit and the individuals involved. (For example, a visit intended simply to break the ice and generate some one-on-one conversation would not require as much time as a visit where teachers share strategies for supporting learning at home.)
- 2. Set a schedule.** Determine when the visits will take place:
 - » During the winter break
 - » Late in the afternoon
 - » Early visits on weekdays
 - » Weekends.
- 3. Form teams.** While many teachers conduct home visits by themselves, some programs are organized so that teachers travel in pairs. This can be a safety measure and it can also be a way to provide for special needs such as translation services. And parents will have an opportunity to meet staff members besides their child's teacher.
- 4. Find funding.** Look for grant opportunities or approach a local service group if school or district funds are not available.
- 5. Assess the results.** Discuss what was learned about each student and how the school and parents can work together to improve learning.

quotable

"To reach their potential, students need parents and the community to take an active role in their education."

—National Education Association

Phone parents with good news, updates

You call parents when kids misbehave or are in trouble. You may call to remind them of a special activity. But you may not know about other ways the phone can turn into a tool for parent involvement. Here are three simple ideas:

- 1. Call when students** do something outstanding. When a child makes 100% on a spelling test, or gives a great book report, take a minute to telephone parents. Describe what their child did and thank them for their help.
- 2. Call if you have a question.** Have you noticed a change in a student—especially one that affects achievement? Tell the parents of your concern. Ask how you can work as a team to help the child.
- 3. Allow the child** to phone home when he does something outstanding. A teacher who does this says she can almost hear the pride in the parent's voice from across the room.
- 4. Let parents call you.** Teachers are sometimes nervous about this option, fearing that they will be swamped with calls. Set limits: "I'll be available to talk to you from 7:00 – 8:00. After that, I will spend time with my own family."

SOURCE: Dan Jesse, "Parent Involvement: A Key to Student Achievement," Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning, www.mcrel.org/topics/noteworthy/noteworthy/danjas.asp.

Get mid-year feedback on things that concern your parents most

As you approach the midpoint in the year, you're probably evaluating some of your classroom practices. It's also a good time to check in with parents. Is your homework harder than you think? Do families think it's easy to get in touch with you when there's a problem? Do parents know what's going on in your classroom?

Create a four- or five-question survey for parents like the one below. It will give you valuable information. Most likely, you'll find that parents are basically feeling "in the loop." But perhaps you'll see one or two small changes that can make things better.

SOURCE: "Family Outreach," Ms. Powell's Management Ideas for Teachers, <http://mspowell.com/parents.html>.

Dear Parents,

It won't be long before I'll be sending home a progress report on your child. Now I'd like you to fill one out on me. Please answer the questions below by circling your responses.

I've also left space for you to share any additional information or concerns. You don't have to sign this progress report, although if you'd like me to call you back, please include your name, phone number and the best time to reach you

Send this paper back in the weekly folder. I enjoy working with your child.

» Amount of homework? Not enough Just right Too much

» Difficulty of homework? Too easy Just right Too hard

» Communication from school? Not helpful Helpful Very helpful

» Child's attitude toward school? Not happy Okay Enjoys school

Comments/ Questions/ Suggestions: _____

Parent's Name (optional) _____

Phone Number _____

I would like you to call me ___ Yes ___ No

The best time to reach me _____

(Download this letter at www.parent-institute.com/fi/resources/progress.pdf)

getting the facts

It's a fact: Giving parents learning ideas to use at home builds achievement.

According to the research, providing parents with ideas they can use to work with their children at home can result in improved academic achievement. This holds true for children from all family backgrounds and income levels. Such simple strategies as weekly homework assignments in which students engage their parents are linked to improved grades for elementary and middle school students.

SOURCE: Anne T. Henderson and Karen L. Mapp, *A New Wave of Evidence—The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement* (Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 1- 800-476-6861, www.sedl.org/welcome.html).