

Engaging Families with a Welcoming Climate

What this means:

Families are active participants in the life of the school and feel welcomed, valued and connected to each other, to school staff, and to what students are learning and doing in class.

Welcoming families is the beginning of the partnership between schools and families. This is the gateway to all other family engagement. When families feel welcome, valued and supported by the school, they are more likely to work together with the school in supporting their child's education. When schools welcome families, they have policies and practices in place to ensure all families are reached and welcomed. Families are honored and their culture is reflected in the learning activities of the school.

Sample Action Steps for Welcoming All Families

Universal Strategies (for all students and families)

- All new families receive a warm welcome by school office staff and a “welcome packet”, including a community services directory, important school contact information, school calendar, coupons to local businesses, etc.
- Front office staff, teachers and administrators receive professional development in customer service and family engagement.
- Teachers make positive, personal contacts with families of students in their classes.
- Before the start of the school year, the school holds an open house, where families can meet teachers, tour the building and have the opportunity to meet other families in a relaxed atmosphere.

Targeted Strategies (for some students and families)

- Before the school year begins, or in the early fall, families of students with IEPs receive a home visit by a parent mentor, special education teacher or family-community coordinator. Family concerns and questions are answered, school and community resources are explained and parents are invited to be full participants in the IEP process.
- New family orientations are held throughout the school year to welcome the families of all new students, help them feel comfortable in the school and to share helpful information with them.
- A translator is available in the school at the beginning and end of the school day to help greet families and to help with any issues or questions families may have.

Intensive Strategies (for a few students and families)

- Schools partner with agencies serving homeless families or highly mobile families.
- Staff and a community partners connect with families at shelters to welcome them to the school and assist them with filling out forms.
- School staff members and partnering community agencies discuss barriers faced by the family and help link the family to service providers.
- Schools make home visits to families who do not attend school events.

Resources

National Family Friendly Collaborative

Family friendly practices and tools including surveys, checklists and suggested action steps

<http://www.partnershipschoools.org>

Virtual Family Friendly School

The *Virtual Tour of a Family Friendly Partnership School* combines the concepts of architecture and improvement planning for a sustained program of actions by educators and families.

This site was created to illustrate a variety of elements that might be present in your Family Friendly Partnership School. The Virtual Tour offers:

- Suggestions/ideas on how to make your school family-friendly.
- Choices of activities that could be part of the school's comprehensive, goal-oriented school, family and community partnership program linked to student success.

<http://education.ohio.gov/GD/Templates/Pages/ODE/ODEDetail.aspx?page=3&TopicRelationID=1532&ContentID=3516&Content=67179>

www.education.ohio.gov keywords: *Family Friendly*

101 Ways to Create Real Family Engagement, by Steve Constantino

The book offers schools practical examples of how educators have welcomed families into schools and have engaged families in the education of their children.

<http://www.familyfriendlyschools.com/productcart/pc/home.asp>

Sources

Constantino, S.M. (2008). *101 ways to create real family engagement*. Galax, VA: ENGAGE! Press.

Edwards, P.A. (1999). *A path to follow: Learning to listen to parents*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.