

Partnering with Families of Middle School and High School Students

Middle schools and high schools face unique challenges when partnering with families and communities. Because middle and high school teachers typically have more students than elementary school teachers, they must work to build partnerships with many more families. Families may live farther away and cannot come to the school as easily. In addition, many families of students in middle and high schools have more difficulty helping their children with their homework.

Adolescent students are beginning to develop their independence and may be less likely to want their families involved. On the other hand, students in these grades already may be more involved in the community because of their participation in sports, internships and jobs. Research shows that school, family and community partnerships continue to have an impact on student success at these grade-levels. Given the unique challenges and opportunities middle and high schools face, creative strategies should be used to build effective partnerships with families and communities.

Sample Action Steps

- Parents who hold high expectations for their teens, communicate them clearly and encourage their adolescents to work hard to attain them, can make a difference in students' success. Schools should talk with parents about the power of parental expectations.
- Provide services and plan activities that help families better understand adolescent development. Examples include activities dealing with health and nutrition, peer pressure, positive discipline strategies, supporting children through crisis, relationship abuse and drug abuse prevention.
- Use student-teacher-family contracts for long-term projects.
- Assign interactive homework that requires students to discuss school work with family or to interview family and community members.
- Use parents as volunteers to serve as boosters or supporters for extracurricular activities.
- Provide clear information to families about the skills that should be acquired in each class and each teacher's homework policies.
- Provide families with clear information about each teacher's criteria for report card grades and on how to interpret interim progress reports.
- Provide workshops or hold meetings on program options, graduation requirements, test schedules and educational options after graduation.
- Provide workshops or hold meetings on financing postsecondary education and applying for financial aid.
- Hold workshops or meetings multiple times throughout the year and vary times to accommodate families' work schedules.
- Post homework assignments and test dates online so families can keep track of when students should be studying or may need help.
- Create a directory to inform students and families about community programs, after-school recreation, tutorial programs, health services, cultural events, volunteer opportunities and summer programs.

- Involve families in goal-setting activities with students to improve or maintain good grades.
- Involve families as volunteers in career exploration.
- Publicize the success of students to emphasize their importance in the community and to keep the community involved.
- Contact families on a regular basis to discuss their children's progress and what they're learning, particularly as it relates to their future.
- Welcome family involvement in the school through family and student tours or classroom visits and observations.
- Connect students with businesses and organizations in the community that could offer internships or volunteer experiences.

Resources

Engaging Families at the Secondary Level – What Schools Can Do to Support Family Involvement

This strategy brief, created by the National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools, includes ideas to consider when engaging families at the secondary level. It also includes examples of specific strategies that counselors, teachers and parents can use to increase involvement at the secondary level.

<http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/rb/rb3-Secondary.pdf>

Family Involvement in Middle and High School Students' Education

This research brief, created by the Harvard Family Research Project, synthesizes the latest research on how family involvement impacts middle and high school students and what types of family involvement are effective.

<http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/publications-series/family-involvement-makes-a-difference/family-involvement-in-middle-and-high-school-students-education>

Strengthening Parents' Ability to Provide the Guidance and Support that Matter Most in High School

This policy brief, created by the Education Commission of the States, reviews research on the types of parental involvement that positively impacts high school students, state and local policies and practices across the country which and the parental involvement component of No Child Left Behind.

<http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/78/48/7848.pdf>

One Dream, Two Realities: Perspectives of parents of America's High Schools

This publication offers national data on parental involvement in high school, including what parents need most from high schools in order to help their children at home.

<http://www.civicenterprises.net/pdfs/onedream.pdf>

It's All in the Family: Middle Schools Share the Secrets of Parent Engagement

This publication offers examples of promising practices which have been effective in schools across the nation.

http://www.nmsa.org/portals/0/pdf/publications/On_Target/family_involvement/family_1.pdf

Parent Involvement at the Middle Level

This article is written to help families learn how they can contribute and be involved in the education of their middle school-aged child.

<http://www.middleweb.com/ParntInvl.html>

Web sites

Exploring Middle School Reform <http://www.middleweb.com/>

National Network of *Partnership Schools, Teachers Involve Parents in School Work*
<http://www.csos.jhu.edu/P2000/tips/index.htm>

Harvard Family Research Project, Family Involvement
<http://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/publications-resources?topic=7>

Sources

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