

Positive Perspectives on Parents and Families

1. Positive Perspectives on Parents and Families

"Whether it's an informal chat as the parent brings the child to school, or in phone conversation or home visits, or through newsletters sent home, teachers can begin a dialogue with family members that can result in learning about each of the families through genuine communication."

-- Sonia Nieto (*)

WHAT

Parents are the child's first teacher and are critically important partners to students and teachers. To help parents become aware of how they can be effective partners in the education process, teachers should engage in dialogue with parents as early as possible about parents' hopes and aspirations for their child, their sense of what the child needs, and suggestions about ways teachers can help. Teachers explain their own limitations and invite parents to participate in their child's education in specific ways.

Parent involvement need not be just how parents can participate in school functions. Oftentimes, religious and cultural differences preclude active participation in school activities. However, parental involvement also includes how parents communicate high expectations, pride, and interest in their child's academic life (Nieto, 1996).

WHY

Constant communication with parents is an important aspect of a child's educational progress. Involving parents and families in their child's educational process results in better scholastic achievement. When families share their "funds of knowledge" with the school community, teachers get a better idea of their students' background knowledge and abilities, and how they learn best (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992).

HOW

1. Seek to understand parents' hopes, concerns and suggestions
 - Conduct needs assessments and surveys (in the parents' first language) of what parents expect of the school community
 - Establish parent-teacher organizations or committees to work collaboratively for the benefit of the students
 - Conduct home visits in which parents are able to speak freely about their expectations and concerns for their children
2. Keep parents apprised of services offered by the school
 - Send weekly/monthly newsletters (in the home language) informing parents of school activities
 - Conduct monthly meeting at parents' homes or community centers to inform parents of school activities
 - Host family nights at school to introduce parents to concepts and ideas children are learning in their classes and to share interactive journals
3. Gain cross-cultural skills necessary for successful exchange and collaboration
 - Research the cultural background of students' families
 - Visit local community centers to find out about the cultural activities and beliefs of the students
 - Tour students' neighborhoods to identify local resources and "funds of knowledge" (Moll et al., 1992)

References:

Moll, L. C., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory Into Practice*, 31(2), 132-141.

Nieto, S. (1996). *Affirming diversity: The sociopolitical context of multicultural education* (2nd ed.). White Plains, NY: Longman.

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