

Teaching Module: Family-Friendly Schools

Overview:

Family friendly schools incorporate outreach strategies that reach out to all families and help involve them in their children's education. Some of the strategies are widely used, such as the fall open house and parent-teacher conferences. Others, like parent resource centers and positive phone calls, are much less common.

Many parents prepare their children well for school on their own and contact the schools as needed. Working with such parents requires little effort. But there are many others who want to help their children learn more, yet do not come to school. This fact should not be taken as evidence that they do not care about their children's education. Making parents feel welcome in the school is the first step to helping them.

Objective(s):

Upon completion of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Identify characteristics of family-friendly schools
- Develop strategies for implementing a family-friendly school

Purpose:

The purpose of this lesson is to increase effective interactions between families, students, schools, and communities.

Materials / Handouts (attached)

1. Characteristics of family-friendly schools
2. Family-friendly schools checklist
3. Family-friendly strategies

Introduction

Family Friendly Schools helps to make sure that all schools are places where families and community members feel welcomed, informed, and included. Students, parents and teachers all stand to benefit when families are engaged and connected with their schools.

- Students do better in school, improve their attendance and are happier with the school climate.
- Parents see increased student achievement, and develop positive and productive relationships with school staff. They have increased confidence in the school and with staff and instructional programs.
- Teachers see increased student achievement, and increased parental support. They are active partners in the improved school climate. www.sandi.net

Activity (use handouts)

1. Characteristics of family-friendly schools

Quick write. Think – Pair – Share. Class will look for common statements and discuss their implication.

2. Family-friendly schools checklist

Organize students into groups according to schools visited. Select a category. Using your knowledge of a school you visited or worked in, indicate where you think each checklist item would fall on the scale? Share your story.

1 _____ 3 _____ 5

1 – does not exist (negative)

3 – Neutral

5 – Evident (positive)

3. Family-friendly strategies

Whole group or small group discussion – Share your “Interest in this area”

Closure:

- Students will share major points learned about creating a family-friendly school
- Instructor will summarize and clarify any questions

Reflections:

- What was the most effective part of this lesson?
- What part of this lesson would have the least impact on student learning?

Featured Websites Resources:

- Creating Family Friendly Schools, Florida Partnership For Family Involvement in Education www.partnershipcenter.usf.edu
- *Reaching All Families Creating Family-Friendly Schools*. 1996. Office of Educational Research and Improvement. E. S. Department of Education - www.ed.gov
- *Family Friendly Schools*, Washoe County School District Parent Involvement Council www.washoe.k12.nv.us
- Parent, Community, and Student Engagement – Family Friendly Schools Division, San Diego Unified School District - www.sandi.net

Characteristics of Family-Friendly Schools

The school environment is friendly and welcoming

Communications are clear and frequent

Parents are truly part of the educational team.

Parents are part of the decision-making process

Partnerships are developed with all families

Parents are encouraged to volunteer

Family-Friendly Schools Checklist

School Climate

- Posted signs warmly welcome parents (in various languages).
- There are directions posted for parents to find their way around the school (in various languages).
- Office personnel greet parents in a friendly, courteous way.
- There is a comfortable reception and information area for parents.
- The principal has clearly posted office hours when parents can drop in to talk.
- There is an orientation program for incoming students and parents.
- There is a program for students and parents who come to the school after the beginning of the year.
- There are regular social occasions where parents and school staff can get to know each other.
- The school permits parents to observe in class.
- The school has an “Open Door” policy where parents are welcome at any time during the school day.

Communication

- There is a school newsletter with up-to-date information.
- The school sends home a calendar listing dates of parents-teacher conferences, report cards, and other major events.
- The school sends home a directory of parent organization representatives and school personnel, with phone numbers.
- The school holds annual open houses and back to school nights.
- The school has a “hot line” for emergencies, rumors, and burning questions.
- Parents know where to go with concerns, questions, and complaints.
- Collaboration
- The school requires at least one parent-teacher conference each year.
- The school provides in-service training to help teachers work with parents.
- There is an early warning policy in effect for teachers to consult with parents promptly if a child is falling behind or having social difficulties.
- Elementary schools confer with parents on choices of classroom settings and/or teachers.
- High schools require parent approval on students’ choices of courses.
- Training and resources are available for parents of students enrolled in exceptional education programs to

help them participate in the Individualized Education Plan and other processes.

Advisors and Decision Makers

- The school publishes a policy handbook for parents.
- There is a mechanism for obtaining parent input on new policies and programs.
- There is a parent-teacher organization that meets at least once a month.
- Parents approach the principal on their own initiative to question general school policy or procedures (aside from those affecting their own child).
- The staff informs and enlists the help of parents immediately when serious problems arise in the school.
- There are established procedures for dealing with parent's demands, especially those of a vocal minority.

Outreach to all families

- There is a policy to inform non-custodial parents about their children's performance and school events.
- Teachers sometimes meet outside school hours with parents who have jobs and cannot easily get away during the working day.
- If there is a substantial minority language population, written communication is provided in that language.
- There is in-service training offered for teachers on how to deal with problems caused by divorce or separation.
- There is a school staff member trained to intervene and work with any parent that refuses to cooperate with the teacher or principal.

Partnership Philosophy

- The school has a written statement about partnerships with parents.
- The school provides in-service training to help teachers work with parents.
- Time is spent during staff meetings discussing working with parents.
- Teachers are encouraged to consult with the principal if they are having difficulty dealing with a parent.
- The principal substitutes in the classroom to allow teachers and other staff to have meetings with parents.

Volunteer Participation

- The school has an organized volunteer program with a coordinator.
- There are a wide variety of jobs available for volunteers, including ones that could be done at home or on weekends.
- All parents are expected to volunteer in some way during the school year.
- The volunteer program is reassessed periodically.

Family-Friendly Strategies

STRATEGIES

**INTEREST IN
THIS AREA**

NOT APPLICABLE
TO OUR SCHOOL

Early School Contact

Focus on the beginning of the school year
Welcome Letters
Information Packets
Calendars
Home School Handbooks
Open House
School Parent Compacts

PERSONAL CONTACTS

Face-to-face interactions
Parent-Teacher Conferences
Home Visits
Parent Liaisons

ONGOING COMMUNICATIONS

Repeated throughout the year
Newsletters
Positive Phone Calls
Home Learning Activities and Homework

SPECIAL PRACTICES AND PROGRAMS

New or uncommon practices
Parent Resource Centers
Informal School-Family Gatherings
Parent Workshops
Secondary: Meetings for special groups
Secondary: What's Next Nights
Parent Support Groups

SPECIAL GROUPS

Parents who are ignored or served poorly
School-Based Literacy and Family Nights
ESOL Adult Education Programs
Non-custodial Parent Information System
Father-child Breakfasts or Dinners

Adapted from *Reaching All Families Creating Family-Friendly Schools*. 1996. Office of Educational Research and Improvement. E.S. Department of Education