



Secondary School Strategies

Research and experience indicate that parent participation falls off in the upper grades. Secondary schools can reduce some common obstacles to family involvement that stem from the organization and curriculum of the school, and help parents cope with the challenges of adolescence.

Welcome Parents

One set of obstacles stems from the sheer size and layout of many secondary schools which make them less than visitor friendly. Schools can become more friendly to visitors in these ways:

- Place clearly marked signs on the outside of the building showing where to enter.
- Instruct guards or other monitors to welcome parents who enter the building and assist them in finding their way.
- Expect office staff to assist parents in a prompt and friendly fashion.
- Rethink the wording of signs that command outsiders to "report to the office" on arrival.
- Create a welcome sign for parents in the entryway, and repeat it in all the languages spoken by families of the students.

Promote Closer Relationships

Another obstacle to family involvement is that students typically have many teachers. Parents can find it difficult to know which teacher to contact. Rarely does any one staff member have a complete picture of each student, except perhaps the guidance counselor. But they often have a heavy caseload of students, making it difficult to know each well.

Some secondary schools are reorganizing in ways that increase teachers' ability to form relationships with parents and students. Secondary schools can encourage family involvement in these ways:

- Create smaller units within the school through "clusters," "houses," schools-within-schools, and other organizational devices.
- Keep the same counselors throughout the high school years so that students have an ongoing relationship with at least one individual at the school.
- Create teams of teachers who stay with students for more than one year.
- Schedule periods for teaching teams to meet with each other to discuss students they all teach and how to build continuing relationships between the school and families.

Reach Out to Specific Groups

Secondary schools are attempting to reach out to special groups of families to address their specific needs:

- Meetings for limited-English parents with translators for major school meetings and parent-teacher conferences.
- Meetings for parents of students who want to attend college to discuss college options and financial aid programs.
- Meetings to describe options available in vocational-technical and work-study programs and career planning generally.

Explain the Curriculum

The secondary curriculum is often more complex and technical than the curriculum parents experienced in their own schooling. Parents may feel incapable of helping their children with questions and homework and intimidated about discussing curriculum concerns or issues with teachers. This has led some schools to offer the following kinds of programs to parents: