

Overcome Obstacles to Parent Involvement



To make parents feel more comfortable visiting the school, post Welcome signs in all languages spoken at the school at each entrance and on each classroom door. Create a special place in the school that is set aside especially for parents, such as a parent center.

Not Knowing How to Contribute

Roadblock: Some parents believe they have talents but don't know whether they are needed or how to contribute them to the school or PTA.

Detour:

- Don't wait for parents to offer to help; seek them out. Suggest a few different but specific options of ways they could volunteer.
- Have teachers and administrators create a list of specific volunteer actions that are needed from parents. Refer to this list and share it with your PTA.
- Ask non-PTA parents as well as members what they'd like to do in the school.
- Faculty and parents could share their list with each other and begin to discuss and form realistic expectations to more effectively use parents' many talents.

Not Understanding the School System

Roadblock: Many parents are unfamiliar with the system and therefore do not know what their rights are or how they can become involved.

Detour:

- Create a simple, short parent handbook covering school rules, procedures, policies, and where to find answers to questions. Use pictures or visuals as much as possible.
- Include names and numbers of contact people who can answer questions in specific areas. Include pictures and names of school administrators, staff, teachers, PTA officers, and other contact people.

Parents in Need

Roadblock: Parents without adequate resources often feel overwhelmed.

Families suffering from economic stress must address their own needs for food, clothing, and shelter before they can see clear to become more involved in their children's education.

Detour:

- Ask the parent or guardian about their situation and listen to them.
- Assign a "buddy" who understands the situation or language to help connect the family to the school.
- Provide information to help parents access and secure the health and social services they need for themselves and their families.
- Schools can work out agreements with social service and health agencies to provide services at the school through school-based clinics or near the school in community-based clinics.
- Schools can develop and distribute to parents a directory containing information on available services and resources in the community and how to access them.
- After families' personal needs are met, schools can then help parents become involved in the education of their children.

Child Care

Roadblock: Child care may not be offered at meetings or school functions.

At the same time, parents may be discouraged from bringing their children to events.

Detour:

- Find an available room and available caregivers for child care at the meeting site.
- Ask PTA members, community members, school service clubs, or other parents to volunteer to provide child care on a rotating basis.
- Hire high school or college students in child development classes or child-care professionals in the community to provide child care and, if appropriate, charge parents a nominal fee.
- Adhere to state-mandated child/adult ratios to provide safe, quality care.

Language Barriers

Roadblock: Parents who don't speak English may not understand newsletters, fliers, or speakers at meetings

Detour:

- Provide printed materials that are sent home and passed out at meetings in all languages spoken by the families in the school.
- The school and surrounding community may need to identify and help secure interpreters and translators for workshops and meetings.

- Another option is to have group activities and social times held in the same room and then have parents of the same language group break off into smaller groups in different rooms for more in depth discussion. Have all parents come together at the end of the meeting and have the bilingual reporter for each group share what was discussed.

Special Needs

Roadblock: Parents with disabilities may find it difficult or feel uncomfortable attending and contributing at meetings.

Detour:

- Simply ask the person about their situation and listen to their responses.
- Consider whether your school is accessible for everyone and hold meetings or events in a space that is accommodating to parents with disabilities.
- Provide someone to sign for deaf or hearing impaired parents, if requested.

Transportation

Roadblock: Lack of transportation or access to parking at the school keeps parents from visiting or attending school activities.

Detour:

- Work with the school to make a block of spaces in the parking lot “for visitors only.”
- Bus parents to special evening events following regular bus routes or have group stops for pickups and drop-offs.
- Form carpools to provide transportation to parents without cars. Hold events in community locations that are easy to get to and are near public transportation.
- If parents cannot attend, provide a home visit or a phone call to inform parents and keep them involved.

National PTA Source: <http://www.pta.org/programs/content.cfm?ItemNumber=1101>

Use Key Strategies for Specific Groups

The following links provide information and resources for focusing on specific groups of families. Follow the links for useful ideas and practices to consider for each group.

- [Hispanic Children and Families](#)
- [American Indian/Alaska Native Children and Families](#)
- [Asian American Children and Families](#)
- [Pacific Islander American Children and Families](#)
- [Male Engagement](#)
- [Children in Military Families](#)
- [Children in Foster Care and Their Families](#)
- [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer/Questioning \(LGBTQ\) Children and Families](#)
- [Children With Special Needs and Their Families](#)
- [Location Matters: Urban, Suburban, and Rural Children and Families](#)
- [Engaging Immigrant and Refugee Families in the Schools](#)

Adapted from <http://www.pta.org/members/content.cfm?ItemNumber=4891&navItemNumber=4909>

