

# Classroom Connections

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## OUTREACH TO FAMILIES

As middle schools strive to increase communication with families, it is imperative for educators to reach out to as many families as possible. This edition of *Classroom Connections* is devoted to strategies that enhance family participation at school. These suggestions are offered as terrific reminders of current ideas your school may be implementing. Also, some new strategies for engaging the more difficult-to-reach families will be shared.

Family Involvement Barriers	Keys to Overcoming Barriers
Language difficulties	Translate materials; have a person who speaks same language make phone calls and home visits.
Lack of "teaching skills"	Provide activities that can be done at home that require little assistance and offer some parent courses.
Overwhelmed by basic needs with limited resources available	Distribute information about community service organization and make appropriate social services referrals.
Lack of transportation and child care	Provide transportation and child care.
Employment schedules	Schedule breakfast or evening meetings—or set up meeting at place of employment.
Feels alienated from school, teachers, and administrators	Ask other families to help make contact; involve community or church leaders.
Feel helpless raising their adolescent	Offer parent/guardian workshops and discussion groups to give adults a forum to express their concerns while seeking advice from others.
Feel intimidated when meeting with a large group of people	Invite the parent/guardian in a few minutes early to meet with one person. Have that person explain who and how many people will be in the meeting.
Have difficulty remembering all of the issues discussed during the meeting	Have someone take notes listing strategies. Also, spend some one-on-one time debriefing.
Tired of hearing the bad stuff	Focus on the positive attributes; provide some positive examples of work.
Feel school is too formal	Make personal contacts—call home, do a home visit, send an e-mail, or write a note.
Does not feel welcome in the school	Provide a school tour guide; train office staff on public relations; offer guests a beverage; provide some basic information about your school and staff.



### Ways Schools Can Ensure Well-Attended and Effective Meetings

- Organize a student welcoming committee.
- Provide refreshments and name tags (have students design their parents/guardians name tag).
- Suggest that the whole family attend the event or activity.
- Advertise beginning and ending time and stick to the schedule.
- Create school-wide incentives to increase parent involvement.
- Ask parents to help organize school activities and encourage them to invite other parents to school events.
- Invite the choir to sing, band to play, or orchestra to perform during the event.
- Display artwork, writings, and poems, or have students perform science experiments or tell stories.
- Provide welcome signs, adequate parking, an effective sound system, and sufficient seating.

### SAMPLE PARENT SIGN-UP SHEET

**Note:** It might be helpful to hand out this form at the beginning of the year and keep some in the office for adults who want to volunteer throughout various times of the year.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Student's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to volunteer to do the following things:

- \_\_\_\_\_ read one-on-one to a student
- \_\_\_\_\_ make food for a staff luncheon or breakfast
- \_\_\_\_\_ work on the school advisory committee
- \_\_\_\_\_ work in the office
- \_\_\_\_\_ help coordinate volunteers
- \_\_\_\_\_ help with the school's career day or other school related events
- \_\_\_\_\_ tutor a student
- \_\_\_\_\_ attend a field trip
- \_\_\_\_\_ attend a PTO/PTA meeting
- \_\_\_\_\_ help in the media center
- \_\_\_\_\_ help with the school newsletter
- \_\_\_\_\_ help make phone calls
- \_\_\_\_\_ other \_\_\_\_\_

I have an idea that might help our school: \_\_\_\_\_

I can help on the following days:    Monday    Tuesday    Wednesday    Thursday    Friday

The best time for me is:    Before School    Morning    Afternoon    Late Afternoon    After School



## LIFESAVERS!

### Thoughts and suggestions from educators about how to increase family involvement...

- Video-tape any events, programs, or guest speakers. Have the tapes available for families to view at home.
- Have families car-pool to events. Encourage them to invite other families to go with them to the school function. This is also a great way to have families interact with each other.
- Establish a “Welcome Wagon” Committee. Have the adults on the committee help by calling families and inviting them to attend parent-teacher conferences or a school activity.
- Try to have someone translate information into other languages. Seek out college students or families that speak another language to help out.
- Have students attend parent-teacher conferences to increase attendance. Consider doing student-led conferences.
- Offer workshops, parenting classes, or book talks that focus on raising a young adolescent.
- Schedule a food function—a chili or spaghetti supper always goes over nicely.
- Continue to remind families about school activities—use your school newsletter, local paper, ask for a free radio spot, use the marquee, include the information on permission slips, or in homework notebooks/agendas.
- Keep the computer lab open during an event to allow students to create cards or calendars with their families.
- Partner families together so they will have someone to talk to and can encourage each other to attend school functions together.
- Encourage advisement teachers to adopt a family. They can contact them about school events and upcoming programs.

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