

Connecting Learning at Home and at School

Secondary School Strategies – Tip Sheet

Secondary school strategies

Research and experience indicate that family participation in their child's education diminishes as children and young people move through their school years. To help halt this decline in participation, secondary schools can reduce some of the common obstacles to family involvement that stem from the organisation and curriculum of the school, and can help families cope with the challenges of adolescence.

Welcome parents

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

- Place clearly marked signs on the outside of the school's buildings showing where to enter.
- Expect office staff to assist families in a prompt and friendly fashion.
- Create a welcome sign for families that uses friendly language and in the languages spoken by the families of students. Avoid using signs that command outsiders to "report to the office" on arrival.

Promote closer relationships

As secondary school students typically have many teachers, families can find it difficult to know which teacher to contact when trying to get involved in their child's education. Rarely does any one staff member have a complete picture of each student, except perhaps the home-room teacher.

Consider reorganising school systems in ways that increase teachers' ability to form relationships with families and students. For example, secondary schools can encourage family involvement in these ways:

- Create smaller units within the school through 'clusters', 'houses', schools-within-schools and other organisational devices.
- Keep the same home-room teacher throughout the high school years so that students have an ongoing relationship with at least one individual at the school with whom families can contact.
- 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.

Explain the curriculum

Today's school curriculum is likely to be very different and more complex than the curriculum that families experienced in their own schooling. Because of this, families can feel incapable of helping their children's homework or answering their questions. Families may also feel intimidated about discussing curriculum concerns or issues with teachers. This has led some schools to offer the following kinds of programs to families:

Training in school subjects

Some schools offer workshops for families in specific curriculum areas such as maths so they can understand what their children are learning.

Family-student workshops

These information sessions provide learning opportunities for the whole family. Sessions can be organised around maths, science, ICT, creative writing, and other topics. Families and their children can work together with hands-on activities and be given more activities to do at home.



Family homework networks

Schools can help organise family networks that supervise afternoon and evening homework sessions. These sessions are particularly useful for single or working parents. Several families agree to host a group of children on a rotating basis and provide them with a supervised and quiet place to study and do homework. These networks require much coordination which might be provided by a parent liaison, volunteer or release time teacher.

Parent-teacher-student study group

Teachers in some schools engage family members in reading books that their children are reading and hold group discussion seminars with students and family members on issues that are raised in these books.

Understand the needs of adolescence

In recent decades there have been changes in the social patterns of the Western world. These changes are reflected in our secondary schools. Many social and developmental factors impact adolescents. For example:

- Adolescents are faced with the social realities of peer pressure, alcohol and other drugs, appeals to sexuality, racism, and sexism. Schools and families must understand the ways in which these factors affect young people.
- In adolescence, children seek greater autonomy. Young people may not want their families to play the same role in their schooling that they once did.

Provide assistance

Schools can assist in the parenting of adolescents by enabling, for example:

Parenting education

Many schools either offer workshops and ongoing educational programs or advertise such workshops and programs run by community providers for parents on issues related to adolescent development. Families tend to be responsive to programs where they can learn about and discuss the difficult issues of adolescence. Some innovative programs link families' educational activities with their children's curriculum. Students, for example, can work in school on issues such as teenage suicide, drugs, and sexuality while families can learn how to talk with their children about these issues.

"What's next?" nights

Programs that address the transition to work after high school, tertiary institution selection and financial assistance can help ease parents concern about what's next for their children after high school. These programs should be offered to families with children at all year levels in the secondary schools so their planning for the future can start in a timely manner.

Family support groups

Schools can involve families in support programs by recognising that many families welcome peer support during their children's adolescent years. Many parents appreciate the opportunity to share approaches and perspectives on parenting issues. Schools may hold parenting workshops for parents and offer seminars for divorced and single parents to address their special needs.

Families as tutors and mentors

Many family members have volunteered to be tutors or mentors to disengaged students, knowing that they especially need positive adult role models. These tutoring and mentoring programs can take place in business, community and school settings. Schools can also develop community service programs and other creative opportunities for young people to go into the community and learn by working with adults.