

Parent Guide to Building School Connectedness and Preventing Disengagement

Students who feel connected to their school attend regularly, get better grades, score higher on standardized tests, are more likely to graduate and continue their education, and avoid risky or harmful behaviors. Making sure that your child is in school or class and actively engaged can ensure that he/she receives the education that is so critical to life success. There are specific things you can do to help the school staff make your child an involved student.

Communicate with Your Child:

- Listen and pay attention to what your child is saying and doing
- Take an active interest in your children's activities and schoolwork
- Encourage them to talk about what is going on - what they are proud of, what they are doing, what they are worried about
- Ask your child how you can help
- Think about what situations he or she might face and talk about ways to handle these situations before they occur.
- Know the children your child associates with and meet and communicate with their parents

Talk about Expectations:

- Let your children know education is important
- Structure home life with school as a priority
- Talk with your child about acceptable and unacceptable behavior and grades
- Discuss homework rules and school attendance and make it clear that you do not approve of unnecessary absences
- Have clear and consistent expectations
- Provide incentives – Always reward appropriate behavior and progress
- Develop and impose consequences for failure to attend, failure to make the effort to fulfill expectations - some examples: losing television or video game time, limiting time with friends, loss of computer or cell phone privileges

Be Prepared:

- Prepare your child for school with study space, required supplies, etc.
- Learn the teacher's and school's expectations regarding learning, behavior and communication
- Know the school's attendance policy and schedule, as well as the difference between an excused and unexcused absence, and share the information with your child
- Establish an appropriate time for your child to go to bed, wake up, have a healthy breakfast, arrive at school, and complete his/her homework
- Monitor things in your home such as family routines that may prevent you or your child from keeping to the school day schedule
- If you need assistance, reach out for help through school and community resources

Make School a Priority

- Plan visits to the doctor or dentist after the school day ends, on Saturday or school holidays
- If you must take an appointment during the school day, allow the child to miss only time needed for that appointment
- Encourage your child to participate in school activities
- Facilitate extracurricular activities with peers, sports, dance, clubs, etc. but not to the degree they interfere with school work
- Plan vacations around school: Always talk with the school before you plan your holiday or vacation
- Don't take students out of school for frivolous reasons. Refuse to write an excuse for unacceptable reasons
- Limit time on TV, computer and video games till homework is done
- Check homework
- Ask child to demonstrate what he/she learned in school
- If child needs help you cannot provide, find someone who can. Talk to the teacher. Honor society students often tutor and some schools have mentoring/tutoring programs

Excerpts from Parents **Guide to School Engagement**

Developed by Hamilton Fish Institute on School and Community Violence under grant by OJJDP emorley 8/11

Work with the School - Stay Informed & Get Involved

- Read school newsletters, notices and email communications
- If English is not your primary language request materials and communications in your language; request a translator for all meetings
- Attend home/school meetings, back to school nights, school events
- Communicate with teachers
- Contact guidance counselors, nurse or other staff as needed to support your child
- If possible volunteer in the library, classroom and/or at special events; offer to share aspects of your culture or job with a class
- Be available: Make sure the school has correct contact information, home, work & cell phone numbers for you, other family members and designated caretakers.
- Be honest: Talk with the principal and school social worker regarding changes that may affect the child's behavior such as divorce, death or sickness in the family, a missing pet or possible move. If your child has special needs, inform the teacher at the start of the year.
- Help the teacher connect with your child: Tell the teacher about your child's hobbies and interests
- Get advice: Ask the teacher for suggestions related to attendance
- Collaborate: Be familiar with the school district's disciplinary policies to ensure that actions at home support or reinforce the actions of the school
- Follow up: When your child must miss school because of illness, contact the school immediately and arrange to pick up assignments, if necessary

How do I address problems?

If you know your child is late to school, missing school, skipping class, not making an effort or not interested in attending school, **you can help.**

Be Alert:

- Look for early signs of a child's decision that school is not worthwhile
- Monitor changes in friendships, teachers, and classrooms or within the family. A move, death, divorce, etc will affect a child and may interfere with school performance
- Recognize good behavior and accomplishments, but be aware of negative behavior changes such as not bringing work home, avoiding school work, or former friends, and for adolescents associating with less desirable peers, alcohol use or staying out late
- Be open to possible problems with learning or with peer relations
- Take your child's complaints about difficulty reading, doing math, concentrating etc. seriously and talk to his/her teacher, guidance counselor or the Intervention & Referral Services chairperson.
- Seek a counselor if your child's behavior becomes distant, withdrawn, anxious, depressed, delinquent or aggressive

Look for Alternatives:

- If your child tells you he or she is bored at school talk to the teacher and consult with other school personnel for guidance
- Help your child build on strengths and feel good about him/herself and about school
- Consult with school personnel for guidance and help
- Pursue in-school enrichment activities; help him/her find a new experience or role in school (i.e. help a teacher, read to younger children, tutor, help in the library, pursue a special interest)
- Seek activities in or outside the school that will build self worth and confidence. (Examples: music lessons, sports, clubs, neighborhood or church-related youth groups, or mentors)
- Enroll your child in a tutoring program, if necessary (often honor society students offer tutoring)

Be Pro-Active:

- Pay attention to what your child is doing, how he/she is using time, who the friends are, what is going well and where problems could be developing
- Have clear and consistent expectations and agreed upon rewards and consequences
- Work at maintaining open communication
- Check in with his/her teachers on a regular basis regarding performance and attendance.
- Review test papers and projects

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- Speak to other parents and guardians who have experienced the same issues and problems as this can be a great way to get valuable advice and information

Involve People, Churches, Business and Community Resources in the Education of Your Child:

- Participate: Sign up and attend parenting education programs. This is a great place to learn new techniques and to share what you have learned
- Create a homework or study group: Seek other parents or older children who are willing to help you and your child with homework. Make your home the homework center or develop a telephone or internet tree to make help available to all the neighborhood children and their parents
- Make yourself aware of what is going on in the community that could benefit you and/or your child, ex activities at the Library, recreation and enrichment programs, school board meetings
- Seek consistency: Insist that all community agencies, social workers, school counselors or juvenile officers work together to develop a coordinated plan of support for your child
- Be a school volunteer or mentor: Volunteer to be a mentor and help children address remedial needs and/or needs not currently supported in school such as music, arts, other enrichment areas, even poetry
- Vote: Vote in local school board elections and voice your opinion about what is working or not working in schools

Education = opportunity

Children have more need of models than of critics. ~Carolyn Coats

Education is not filling a pail but the lighting of a fire. ~William Butler Yeats

A child seldom needs a good talking to as a good listening to. ~Robert Brault

He who opens a school door, closes a prison. ~Victor Hugo

The object of education is to prepare the young to educate themselves throughout their lives. ~Robert Maynard Hutchins

An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest. ~Commonly attributed to Benjamin Franklin

It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men. ~Frederick Douglass