

Equality and Equity Toolkit

9. Practical ideas for engaging more and different families

Created by Connect - www.connect.scot



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Practical ideas for engaging more and different families

Here are some ideas to think about when planning improvement activities

1. The majority of parents want the best for their children. Think about the challenges the school community and some parents face when trying to get engaged with their child's learning and education; these could include:
 - family/work issues
 - literacy/language
 - their own experience of school
 - lack of confidence
 - don't know how to get involved
 - money worries
 - childcare
 - unconscious bias; assumption and perceptions held by some teachers and parents
 - disability
 - gender
 - political correctness (some people may be worried about offending others)
 - health issues.
2. Make sure everyone in the school community understands these challenges and works together to develop joint approaches to supporting parents and families.
3. Find out about the different experiences of families with children at the school; for example, how many families have English as an additional language?
4. Ask family members/pupils/community groups to act as interpreters for those with English as an additional language.
5. Send out a survey/questionnaire asking what support families need.
6. Build relationships with Home Link Workers and Community Learning and Development Workers who are often in contact with those parents/carers

who don't always get involved with the school - they may have useful tips for reaching out to them.

7. Make contact with community and/or faith groups to ensure parents from a variety of backgrounds are kept informed. Ask to speak at their meetings/events to advise them how families could be involved.
8. The personal touch can make such a difference - a phone call, a smile, asking someone how they are can help break down barriers.

Communication

1. Build up effective methods of communication using different tools. For example, work with the Parent Council to set up a Facebook page to let parents know about events and meetings.
2. Work together to create a welcome pack for new families which could include information about the school, local services and community groups. It is a nice idea to include a handwritten note from another parent to welcome them to the school.
3. Ask different parents to write an article for a newsletter, for Facebook or for a website, describing their own experiences from their careers, school life or learning.
4. Remember that not all families have access to the Internet so think about using a mix of communication methods.
5. Carry out an audit of skills amongst the parents by asking them if they are good at things like DIY, cookery, ICT, gardening, art, etc. Ask them personally if they would be willing to help out as necessary - the personal approach often works best.
6. Make sure families receive information from the school, Parent Council and local authority that is written in user-friendly language - get rid of jargon and acronyms!
7. Work with the Parent Council and other parents to develop resources to explain various aspects of the school and children's learning. You could adapt Connect resources including the list of acronyms, jargon buster, etc.

Events and Activities

1. Don't forget the three words for a successful social event - fun, family and food. What about an International Evening to share food, songs and stories?
2. Make sure events are accessible for all and don't always cost families money. Target transition times and work with the Parent Council to organise events for new parents.
3. Think about the sort of information parents need at different stages of their child's development. For example:
 - how to cope with behavioural issues
 - how to recognise/tackle substance abuse
 - helping with revision and study
 - how to support your child with post-school decisions
 - internet safety
 - sexual health and relationships
 - mental health & wellbeing.
4. The Parent Council could set up support groups, organise online workshops/presentations or provide information via social media.

Parent Council business

1. Remember that you don't have to call your group a Parent Council - the word 'council' may be off-putting to some parents. You can call your group anything you want to suit your school community. Some examples include: *Friends of...and Parent Partnership*.
2. Make sure your Parent Council is parent-friendly! Make sure everyone knows who is on the Parent Council by displaying photos of committee members and contact details - a generic email address is best (eg ourschoolpc@gmail.com). Encourage the Parent Council to chat to parents whenever possible.
3. Find out what financial and other support is available for Parent Councils from your local authority and how you can access this to spend on improving communication.

4. Acknowledge the different experiences of parental involvement / engagement - it's not just about being at Parent Council meetings. Promote other ways for families to be involved; think about virtual membership, class/year representatives and subcommittees.
5. Meetings don't have to be too formal; make sure you have someone to welcome and explain things to guests and new members. Make sure everyone understands any educational jargon or acronyms.

When using or sharing this Toolkit, please acknowledge Connect as the source. We welcome your comments and feedback.

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