

FAMILY-FRIENDLY SCHOOLS

SELF-ASSESSMENT



This is a self-assessment tool based on a family-centered approach and discussed in the training series *Working Respectfully with Families: A Practical Guide for Education and Human Service Workers* (Connard, etc. 1996).

Family-friendly schools create a supportive climate for children and families based on the following assumptions:

The parent is the child's first teacher

Congruence between values taught at home and school is necessary to promote educational success

Parents' support of education and learning is essential regardless of their level of education, economic status or cultural background

The school must take the lead role in eliminating traditional barriers to parent involvement (Fruchter, etc., 1992)

School members should use this as a self-assessment tool, as a springboard for discussion, not as an evaluation of programs. When each question is discussed, members can talk about what this would look like in their school community.

Directions: Rate your school or agency on a scale of 1 to 5:

1 = not at all, 2 = beginning, 3 = some of the time, 4 = most of the time, 5 = all of the time

1. Outreach to Families

In our school, we:

Use a personal, face-to-face approach to recruit and invite families.

1 2 3 4 5

Help parents get involved by providing transportation or assist in finding transportation when needed.

1 2 3 4 5

Utilize parent liaisons, family advocates, and other members of the community who may be part of a family's informal support network to help make connections with families.

1 2 3 4 5

Have staff available to greet children and parents as they drop off and pick-up their children, especially in the first week.

1 2 3 4 5

Design activities to be non-stigmatizing, non-threatening, and non-evaluative.

1 2 3 4 5

Use fun activities as early ice-breaking events.

1 2 3 4 5

Schedule activities and events to fit the availability and work hours of parents; encourage active staff participation in these events.

1 2 3 4 5

Tailor events to specific, parent-identified needs or interests.

1 2 3 4 5

Provide many different ways for parents to participate in the school, (i.e. advocacy, parent and community networking, cultural exchange, as mentors, adult learners, classroom aids, and participants on site councils and curriculum-planning teams).

1 2 3 4 5

2. Supporting Children's Learning

In our school we:

Convey the message that parents are experts concerning their own children

1 2 3 4 5

Provide information, resources and support for families as they develop learning opportunities in the home.

1 2 3 4 5

Break barriers to participation by providing childcare, language translation, written information in each family's home language, home visiting, etc.

1 2 3 4 5

Suggest books and other learning resources to parents

1 2 3 4 5

Provide homework assignments for children that are "family-friendly," and includes information and instructions that help families expand on the school curriculum

1 2 3 4 5

Provide parents avenues to explore learning with their children in the school environment

1 2 3 4 5

3. A Welcoming Climate

In our school, we:

Create a welcoming, accepting climate, reflecting the cultures and languages of the families and community where the school is located.

1 2 3 4 5

Create a welcoming reception area that contains information about the school and directions so family members can find their way around.

1 2 3 4 5

Provide a variety of opportunities for parents and children to become acquainted with the school environment and staff.

1 2 3 4 5

Provide meaningful ways for non-English speaking parents to participate. Make accommodations to allow these parents to participate in the same ways other parents can.

1 2 3 4 5

Initiate frequent, informal and positive contacts between staff and parents.

1 2 3 4 5

Provide opportunities for informal socializing among parents and between parents and staff, including office and administration staff.

1 2 3 4 5

Provide a space for parents at the school that is safe, accessible, and comfortable.

1 2 3 4 5

Explore and establish ways to create a trusting climate where parents feel comfortable bringing concerns to the school.

1 2 3 4 5

Treat all parents with respect.

1 2 3 4 5

Give positive feedback and appreciation.

1 2 3 4 5

Provide training for all staff in working respectfully with families.

1 2 3 4 5

Give parent volunteers and leaders support, training, and recognition.

1 2 3 4 5

4. Opportunities to Get Acquainted

In our school, we:

Take time and provide structure for parents to get acquainted with each other within the school environment.

1 2 3 4 5

Help families build their informal supports by encouraging parents getting together outside the school.

1 2 3 4 5

Build on the life experiences, strengths, and capabilities of parents by inviting them to share in the classroom program or school.

1 2 3 4 5

Include small group activities during formal large group meetings and functions to encourage networking.

1 2 3 4 5

5. Meaningful Adult Learning Opportunities

In our school, we:

Include the interests and concerns of parents when planning learning activities.

1 2 3 4 5

Provide a variety of informational materials and technology for parent use: audio, video, computer, and other resources and offer appropriate training to use these resources.

1 2 3 4 5

Ask parents to share their expertise, encouraging parent-to-parent information exchanges, as well as parent/professional exchanges.

1 2 3 4 5

Offer parents connections to classes for adult education (e.g. link families to alternate sources of transportation and funding sources, hold classes at the school, offer educational advising).

1 2 3 4 5

Use interactive activities and parent-oriented discussions rather than primarily lectures during learning activities.

1 2 3 4 5

6. Collaborative Group Processes

In our school, we:

Encourage parent ownership of the group through joint responsibility and decision making.

1 2 3 4 5

Use group processes that help parents and staff to work together.

1 2 3 4 5

Offer parents opportunities to problem-solve with professionals and other parents and make decisions both staff and parents are comfortable with.

1 2 3 4 5

Share leadership roles with parents.

1 2 3 4 5

Have group-centered (rather than leader-centered) discussions.

1 2 3 4 5

Work with conflict openly and respectfully.

1 2 3 4 5

Provide opportunities for families to give feedback regarding school curriculum/activities.

1 2 3 4 5

References

Connard, C., Novick, R. & Nissani, H. (1996). *Working respectfully with families: A practical guide for education and human service workers*. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

Fruchter, N., Galetta, A. & White, J.L. (1992) *New directions in parent involvement*. Washington, D.C.: Academy for Educational Development.

Available at <http://www.nwrel.org/cfc/frc/pdf/Handout10.PDF>

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